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Thursday, 19 March 2009, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Shalgham	(Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Jurica
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Japan	Mr. Takasu
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Turkey	Mr. İlkin
	Uganda	Mr. Rugunda
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Sawers
	United States of America	Ms. DiCarlo
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2009/135)

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09-27354 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2009/135)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Canada, the Czech Republic, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Pakistan, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Tanin (Afghanistan) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Kai Eide, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2009/135, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Kai Eide, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Eide: I will start with some developments that are not frequently reported and do not receive the public attention that they deserve. Nonetheless, they are important if we are to form a more complete picture of developments in Afghanistan.

First, after all the changes that have taken place over the past few months, the Afghan Government today is better and more competent than ever before and the quality of provincial governance is better.

Secondly, cooperation among key elements inside the Government has improved; that applies most prominently to the security ministries and institutions. And the results are clear. We see an enhanced ability to uncover terrorist networks and to prevent attacks from taking place. Yes, there have been some spectacular terrorist attacks in Kabul, but the overall number of attacks in the capital has gone down, not least because of this improved coordination. In addition, the economic ministries are working in a more coherent manner following changes in the leadership of the ministries of Finance, Agriculture and Commerce. That should enable the Government to develop more unified economic policies.

Thirdly, these changes have enabled the Government to better address some of our long-standing concerns. Let me just mention a few of them.

With regard to the police, a comprehensive reform effort is under way to strengthen and clean up the police force. That should lead to a more efficient fight against the insurgency, greater respect for the rule of law and an enhanced ability to fight corruption. A significant number of police officers have been removed and are being prosecuted.

A national agricultural strategy will be launched in April. It will include all the major sectors of agriculture and establish pool funding for donors. The main objectives are, of course, to increase agricultural production, to develop marketing capabilities and to enhance rural employment.

The new team in the Ministry of Commerce is addressing the challenges of private-sector development: the establishment of a legal framework, the setting of

investment promotion priorities, licensing reform and trade and transit agreements with neighbouring countries. And let me remind members that police, agriculture and private-sector development have all suffered from neglect for years. They are now being addressed as priority areas.

Fourthly, the improved internal cohesion that we now see emerging in the Government will help us to overcome the fragmentation that has so far hampered coordination with the international community. A stronger Afghan counterpart will allow us to make better use of the main coordination body, the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board.

Fifthly, the prognosis for poppy cultivation in 2009 indicates that there is the potential for a very significant decline in production across the country. We could see a further increase in the number of poppy-free provinces, as well as serious reductions in poppy production in the South. That could be a turning point in our counter-narcotics efforts.

Those developments represent potential success stories. However, I underline the word "potential" because our ability to turn them into reality will, to a large extent, depend on the ability of the international community to respond quickly with support. There is a need to provide trainers, mentors and equipment to the police. There is a need to adjust and strengthen agricultural assistance with a view to responding flexibly to new priorities and new programmes. There is a need to provide support for governors who are determined to make their provinces poppy-free and to farmers who are ready to switch from poppy to licit crops.

If we could succeed in those areas, then we would truly live up to the commitments that we all undertook in Paris in June last year. And, for the first time, we would be able to seriously address some of our most serious, most long-standing and deepest concerns: fighting corruption and crime, reducing the flow of financial resources to the insurgency and improving food security.

There are no quick fixes; it will take time. But, for the first time in many years, there have been promising developments. If we do not respond quickly, then we may well face new stagnation and even backlash in several of these sectors. That we cannot afford. Progress in each of them will contribute to political stability and economic growth and be a critical component of any international exit strategy.

Of course, the main credit for this progress goes to prominent Afghan politicians and officials. However, it would not have been possible without the presence and commitment of the international community, civilian as well as military. So this is not a time to waver; it is a time to remain committed.

These positive trends are so often overshadowed by dramatic events and political developments — at this point, mainly the security situation and the intense debate about the presidential and provincial elections. Yes, the security situation has deteriorated over the past few months. A mild winter provided a suitable environment for maintaining high levels of violence, and an early Ramadan allowed for a prolonged fighting season. As a result, the overall number of security incidents in December 2008 rose by 42 per cent compared with that in the previous December; in January 2009, it was 75 per cent higher than in January 2008. As I mentioned, the number of incidents in Kabul has gone down, owing partly to the improved performance of Afghan security forces, but we have to expect an intense fighting season, starting only a few weeks from now.

The election process has, of course, taken centre stage in our efforts and has also been at the centre of attention in the media. We now have an agreement on the election date, 20 August, which means that we can plan, from a financial, procurement, organization, training and security point of view, on the basis of a firm deadline. The main challenge now is, of course, how to resolve the dispute regarding what will happen between 22 May, when the current presidential term ends according to the Constitution, and the beginning of the next presidential term.

Our message to Afghan politicians and to the opposition is clear. They must reach a political consensus that ensures the legitimacy and strength of Afghan institutions until the next presidential inauguration. Reaching such a consensus is a matter of vital political interest. Such consensus has been reached in the past when national interests were considered to be at stake. But when leaders have failed to reach a national consensus, we know that the costs for the country have been very high.

The international community has 70,000 troops in Afghanistan operating alongside Afghan forces today. Billions of dollars are invested. The summer months represent the peak of the fighting season. We cannot

afford to see these months become a period of political and constitutional instability. We need a Government and we need institutions that can continue their work with full strength and broad legitimacy.

We also have a message for the Government. The opposition has concerns that are real and well-founded. They relate to the transparency and fairness of the election process. The Afghan Government must demonstrate that it is ready to do its utmost to reassure the opposition that elections will be fair and transparent and that the resources of incumbency will not be misused.

Finally, there is a message for the international community. We must also do our outmost to establish mechanisms with the very same objectives — transparency and fairness — in cooperation with the Afghan authorities and civil society. I urge those who have been invited to send international observers — the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe — to play their parts fully alongside domestic observation efforts. The United Nations and the Independent Electoral Commission will establish an election complaints commission, which will be as robust as possible under current circumstances. A media complaint commission will be established and the United Nations and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission will monitor respect for political rights.

All involved — the Government, the opposition and the international community — must understand the costs of a flawed and unfair election process. The result would be prolonged political instability when stability is required more than ever. The result would create doubt in the minds of many Afghans about the value of democratic processes when confidence is needed.

Civil-military cooperation is an important part of our mandate. The relationship between the International Security Assistance Force and the United Nations Mission has continued to improve. Together with the Afghan Government, we have come a long way now in formulating the integrated approach that we have been talking about for years. The aim is simple: to allocate our overall resources — civilian and military — in a way that would allow us to make the best possible use of them; to strengthen development efforts where they can proceed unhindered; and to provide a better basis of governance in swing districts, gradually attracting more civilian development where such efforts have so far been difficult. We must learn to work together in a different way than in the past.

The United Nations has taken a lead in addressing civilian casualties and military behaviour that does not adequately respect Afghan cultural sensitivities. This follows from our obligation to protect and promote human rights, but our engagement is also motivated by the need to ensure strong Afghan support for a continued international engagement. We have seen how serious incidents have not only affected support for the international military forces, but have also made the humanitarian and development community more vulnerable. The number of civilian casualties rose by 40 per cent last year, with the insurgency clearly accounting for the majority of such casualties.

I am pleased to see that the commander of international forces, General McKiernan — to whom I pay tribute — is addressing this problem so strongly and convincingly in his instructions to the troops: to minimize the use of air power; to improve coordination with Afghan security forces, giving them the lead where possible; and to respect, as I said, the cultural sensitivities of the Afghan population.

President Karzai has expressed his views strongly and repeatedly. These are views shared by many Afghans, and they are being listened to and addressed. Unfortunately, I must add, insurgency groups continue their indiscriminate and deliberate attacks on civilians.

I understand those who say that an increased troop level may reduce the requirements to use airpower and lead to a lower number of civilian casualties, but we should also admit the danger of the opposite happening. Additional troops will mean more fighting, and that is the purpose. With more troops and frequent troop rotations, the international military forces must ensure that they operate in a way that solidifies both the support of the Afghan public and of public opinion in troop-contributing countries.

Inadequate donor coordination is a major concern to all of us and a priority element of our mandate. We have made progress in some areas. I believe political coordination is better than before. With regard to donor coordination, the picture is more complex and perhaps less encouraging. There have, in recent months, been a number of discussions of policy-shaping, which I hope will eventually turn into policymaking. Furthermore, some countries are channelling more resources through national programmes and the Afghan budget. But I

continue to have serious worries, as Council members are aware, about a number of our practices.

First, we must, as much as possible, move away from the use of contractors, who are often overpaid and underqualified, whose aim is to finish projects quickly before they move on to the next. The short-term costs of such development policies are high and the long-term impact is low. We must be better at measuring our achievements in terms of impact, cost-effectiveness and effect on capacity-building.

Secondly, I know that some Council members are tired of this, but I come back to what I have called the donor-generated fragmentation of Afghanistan. I understand the need to build where you fight, but the balance is wrong and getting worse, despite constant warnings, agreed commitments and urging by Afghan authorities. An increasing number of donors are taking an increasingly province-based perspective of Afghanistan. A shared nationwide perspective is required. If the current trends are not corrected, then I fear turbulence where there is today stability, as well as an increasing inability to implement national programmes.

Thirdly, where possible, the international military should channel development resources through civilian authorities and institutions — preferably Afghan — rather than do the development work themselves. I would recommend that all Provincial Reconstruction Teams channel, wherever possible, development resources through often underfunded but successful mechanisms, such as the National Solidarity Programme. That would make projects less expensive and more sustainable, and it would enhance the position of the Afghan Government in the eyes of its public.

Fourthly, I now believe that the use of an amount of between $500 million and $1 billion is never reported to the Afghan Government. Consequently, the Afghan Government does not know — and we do not know — how much is being spent across the country and for what purposes. As a result of the lack of coordination and transparency, large portions of the National Development Strategy will go unfunded. The majority by far of all aid is spent outside the control of the Government, and any attempt to influence how it is spent is hampered by an extraordinarily complex international donor system.

With the assistance of the World Bank, we will soon set up a new, comprehensive and easily accessible database at the Ministries of the Economy and Finance. I urge all donors to make full use of it. So many donors I meet underline the importance of better coordination, but so few, I must say, show a readiness to modify their practices. Those practices have brought us into the state of fragmentation and confusion in which we still find ourselves.

The United Nations will also set up a new peer review mechanism, the purpose of which will be to bring together donors in certain priority areas so as to ensure that they are not duplicating, but complementing, each other, and that they have a strategic perspective in accordance with the plans of the Afghan Government. This initiative is supported by the Afghan Government itself and by main donors.

I have mentioned the need to focus more on capacity- and institution-building, which is one of our priorities. It is the most important element in building Afghanistan, and it is the most important element of an international exit strategy. It has worked well in building the Afghan army and it is starting to work well in building the police. Why is that so? It is so primarily because there are national programmes. It is not enough to send people. So often we have seen how a supply-based as opposed to a need-based approach has failed. Often, I must admit, I have wondered whose capacity is being built — the capacity of foreign experts or of the Afghan institutions.

I firmly believe that a massive — I repeat, massive — capacity- and institution-building programme is required. It must be at the top of our priorities. This includes ensuring that, wherever possible, capacity-building is an integrated part of every development project. It includes a more strategic approach to education and the building of institutions at a national and at a subnational level. I am talking about the security institutions, the judicial institutions, ministries and provincial and district administrations.

But success will depend on the following aspects. We must formulate a national vision and national programmes: a fragmented and piecemeal approach will not work. Programmes should include qualified people, the technical assets required and financial resources. Afghan ownership must be ensured. And capacity-building should, where possible, include both training and mentorship. Capacity- and institution-building is not the kind of activity that lends itself to ribbon-cutting events or to photo opportunities. But it

is the most critical element in enabling the Afghans to run their own affairs.

Let me illustrate why I insist on more strategic and long-term thinking. Recently I had a meeting with the Minister of Education, the Minister of Higher Education and the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs. They are all responsible for education of all sorts, including vocational training. They told me that very, very soon millions of young girls and boys will complete their secondary education — millions. That is good news. But there is very limited capacity to absorb them into higher education. Only 4 per cent of them will be able to move on to vocational training. If this is not soon corrected, Afghanistan will not be able to make use of its intellectual resources, and the potential for economic growth will be significantly limited. The private sector will not have the qualified and educated people it needs.

The readiness of donors to provide primary education is very encouraging. One country is building 200 schools in its own province — I say "its own" because it has a Provincial Reconstruction Team there. But the neighbouring province lacks anything resembling this type of generosity. And resources for higher education and vocational training in the same provinces are very scarce. So now is a time for strategy and policy reviews. I therefore welcome those reviews that are under way and believe that they can re-energize our common effort in a meaningful way at a critical moment.

However, I would also emphasize that we have set priorities — we have agreed on them, in Paris and elsewhere. The main problem is our limited readiness to implement our priorities — to implement what we have agreed on — and to be flexible enough to respond to changes and to have a strategic, nationwide perspective in our work.

I have touched upon our human rights mandate in terms of civilian casualties, as well as the election process. Allow me only to mention two other areas that I believe are important and need our full attention: the rights of women in Afghan society and freedom of expression.

I have been disturbed by recent reports of violence against women and brutal rape cases. The Mission and I are speaking out consistently against such phenomena, against the marginalization of women in Afghan society, against the prevailing atmosphere of impunity, and against the lack of access to the court system and to adequate health facilities. Afghanistan is today the only country in the world where the average life expectancy for women is much lower than that for men.

And we are speaking out to promote the education of women and their ability to take part in Afghan society. It is a matter of human rights, but it is also a matter of making full use of the entire Afghan population in building the country. Afghanistan cannot afford to keep 50 per cent of its population marginalized. There are women in prominent positions today, but they are few. Many more are needed to serve as role models for the young female population and to use their resources for the benefit of their country.

We have also constantly raised the question of freedom of expression, which is always important, but even more so when an election campaign is approaching.

When I last addressed the Security Council, I was deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation and the prospects of starvation occurring in large parts of the country. That danger has not passed. But so far the winter has not brought the humanitarian crisis that many of us feared. The prospects for the next harvest seem to be better than last year. In the middle of April we will be better able to assess the situation and the prospects than we are today.

Over the next few months, there will be several conferences on the regional dimension of our work. I very much welcome this wider focus. I hope that these various conferences can be prepared in a way that turns them into a process rather than a series of separate events.

The improved relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan is encouraging. None of us underestimates the challenges and the need to support this new relationship, as illustrated by the appointment of so many special envoys for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The potential for regional cooperation is indeed impressive. It ranges from huge infrastructure projects that bring the wider region together to small-scale cooperation in agriculture. The meeting in Paris in December served to mobilize the attention and interest of donors. As a follow-up to the Paris meeting, experts met in Brussels two days ago to identify priority projects in preparation for the regional economic

cooperation conference in Islamabad. We are, I believe, moving from a declaratory phase to an operational phase. Already, the new electricity supply from Uzbekistan to Kabul through other cities in Afghanistan is a visible sign of the value of regional cooperation.

I am convinced that in economic cooperation as well as in capacity-building, all neighbouring countries could and should play a significant role. For instance, agricultural experts from neighbouring countries know Afghanistan, know the climate, know the language and in addition to that are less expensive than experts from Western countries or elsewhere. They represent a significant untapped resource that should be mobilized.

I have always insisted that military means alone cannot bring an end to the conflict. A political process will ultimately be needed. However, we should not believe that such a process of reconciliation can be a shortcut to peace or a replacement for other efforts to build Afghanistan. Reconciliation is not a substitute, but an indispensable final component.

Furthermore, a peace process will never succeed if the Government and the international community do not have confidence in themselves. We must address reconciliation in a way that projects strength and conviction and not weakness and doubt. If we do not have confidence in ourselves then the Afghan people will not have confidence in us and in their own future. That would damage any reconciliation process.

I am coming to the end of my speech. In a few days time, all of us and many more will meet in The Hague. It will not be a donor conference. It will be a political manifestation of support and commitment. My hope is that the conference will provide new energy and shared readiness not to re-examine all our agreed priorities, but to demonstrate readiness to implement them and to use our resources in a flexible and coordinated way. For me, the Hague Conference is a test of political will. It is an occasion to push aside the doom-and-gloom atmosphere, roll up our sleeves and support the positive trends that we now see emerging in Afghanistan.

And let us all avoid the impression that we are discussing what to do about Afghanistan. We must discuss what we can do together with the Afghans. If they feel that a debate is going on somewhere out there about them — and not with them — then we will deeply offend their sense of dignity and ownership. That sense of ownership is critical to the strength of the Government in the eyes of its public, to its confidence in itself and, ultimately, to our success in defeating the insurgency.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Eide for his briefing and for the comprehensive report.

I will now give the floor to Council members.

Mr. Rugunda (Uganda): I wish to thank Mr. Kai Eide, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his comprehensive, down-to-earth and compelling briefing on the situation in Afghanistan.

It will be recalled that during his last briefing to Council, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General outlined key benchmarks which he hoped UNAMA would meet in six months. These included specific criteria to measure aid effectiveness, strengthening the Government's mechanisms for combating corruption, determining the kind of police force required, designing an agricultural reform programme and improving the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship.

We would like to commend UNAMA for its important role in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan. UNAMA has spearheaded the efforts of the international community, in conjunction with the Government of Afghanistan, in rebuilding the country and strengthening the foundations of peace and constitutional democracy. We know it is not an easy task that UNAMA has, but the Special Representative and his staff should be commended for pressing on with the implementation of UNAMA's mandate.

We have noted in the report before us (S/2009/135) the serious challenges in Afghanistan, but there has also been some progress. We commend the Government and people of Afghanistan and the international community for their tireless efforts.

We welcome the upcoming elections that have shaped and dominated the political landscape in the country. We note the decision of the Independent Electoral Commission to extend presidential elections to 20 August 2009, and we note that this may continue to elicit mixed reactions. Uganda encourages a smooth and transparent electoral process, which we believe is a cornerstone of long-term stability. As the country

prepares for the August presidential and parliamentary elections, every effort must be made to ensure that calm and stability prevail in Afghanistan. Reconciliation among Afghans of all shades of opinion should be seen to be an important component of an inclusive political process beyond elections.

We are concerned by the serious security situation in Afghanistan today. The security situation has continued to deteriorate, with the civilian population bearing the brunt of the causalities. Security remains key to progress in all areas of Afghanistan. We welcome the integrated approach that is being put in place by the international community and the Government of Afghanistan to ensure a more coherent and effective use of civilian and military resources. More efforts have to be made to protect the civilian population from attacks.

We also believe that, at the regional level, the Government of Afghanistan, with the support of the international community, should find a way to involve regional stakeholders in a comprehensive regional security strategy. We therefore welcome the joint declaration on bilateral cooperation, signed in January with Pakistan, as a significant step forward.

It is necessary for the rule of law to be sufficiently institutionalized in order to ensure long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan. We urge the Government to effectively address those issues which are undermining the legitimacy of Afghan law enforcement and judicial institutions, but which also erode people's confidence in Government and public institutions. The Government will require increased support from the international community in institution-building, rather than pushing quick fixes. We welcome the report that the drug eradication campaign, conducted by the Government with support from the international community, has yielded some positive results. However, with poverty still overwhelming, any long-term solution would, among other things, have to address alternative sources of income for those who, driven by poverty, indulge in the drug trade.

The briefing has shown that Afghanistan still faces social and economic challenges that require a holistic approach. Durable peace and stability in Afghanistan will be achieved faster after tangible results have been achieved in governance, rule of law, respect for human rights and economic recovery and development. It is therefore important that resources are used in a coordinated and comprehensive way to empower Afghans to bear responsibility for their future.

Uganda urges the international community to fully align their efforts behind the financing and implementation of the agreed development strategies by delivering assistance in a coordinated way and increasingly through the national budget. We call on the Government of Afghanistan to play its role and make progress in strengthening institutions and introducing accountability mechanisms to provide the international community with the confidence to commit more assistance to the ongoing effort.

If our joint endeavours in Afghanistan are to succeed, it is imperative that UNAMA has the necessary resources to fulfil its mandate. We therefore urge the international community, and the United Nations Member States in particular, to support UNAMA in its efforts to rebuild Afghanistan. In this regard, we fully support the renewal of UNAMA's mandate.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Mr. Kai Eide for his work and for the frank and exhaustive analysis of the situation in Afghanistan and for his presentation of the Secretary-General's regular report.

We are seriously concerned that, despite the efforts of the Afghan authorities and the international military presence, the security situation in the country continues to deteriorate. The terrorist activities of the Taliban, Al-Qaida and other extremists, whose activities undermine the foundations of Afghan State structures and statehood and hamper the process of stabilization and recovery, are steadily increasing. A special concern arises from the fact that terrorists practically control a whole set of regions of Afghanistan, on whose territory they are setting up parallel organs of power. Today, as never before, it is important that Afghan power structures and the international military presence jointly reverse the negative security situation.

Russia backs the activities of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, implemented on the basis of the mandate entrusted to it by the Security Council. Our practical contribution to these efforts is the implementation of agreements with NATO regarding transit through Russian territory of

non-military supplies for foreign military contingents in Afghanistan. In the last few days, along the North Route, the first shipment of our supplies was delivered in Kabul.

In the context of armed conflict with the Taliban, there is serious concern at the continuing instances of deaths among the peaceful population as a result of the operations of the foreign military presence. We view the agreement between NATO and Afghanistan's Ministry of Defence on coordinating counter-terrorist activities as an important step in preventing new indiscriminate strikes.

We share the assessment of the Secretary-General in his report that this year will be decisive for Afghanistan as a result of the presidential and provincial elections planned for August. The upcoming ballot is especially important to make the democratic changes and the development of State institutions sustainable. We hope that the United Nations Mission will, as in previous years, fully support the election process.

The successful conduct of elections will undoubtedly create additional opportunities for promoting national reconciliation in Afghanistan. We remain convinced that this process, including taking into account the momentum of the military-political situation in the country, must be implemented in strict compliance with Security Council resolution 1267 (1999), which concerns the anti-Taliban sanctions regime. Any attempts to flirt with extremists involved in war crimes and gradually place them in power are fraught with further destabilization.

Despite recent positive successes in countering the Afghan drugs threat, the joint counter-narcotics efforts must be further increased. That is especially pressing, as drugs trafficking remains one of the main sources of financing for terrorists.

Our country is actively backing the fight against the Afghan drugs threat implemented at various levels. At the beginning of this week, during the visit to Kabul of Russia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, we signed a Russian-Afghan intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in the fight against the illicit trafficking in narcotic substances. We are convinced that the implementation of that agreement will enable us to step up joint efforts between Russia and Afghanistan to counter drug-related crime.

We believe that in the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime there is a need to fully utilize regional organizations, which have shown their effectiveness in the work in this field. These include, for example, the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Strengthening the counter-narcotics and anti-terrorist security around the Afghan State will enable us not only to significantly weaken the financing of extremists but also to achieve rapid stabilization in Afghanistan and in the region as a whole.

We expect that a significant political impulse to deal with the aforementioned tasks will be provided by the convening in Moscow on 27 March of a special conference on Afghanistan under the aegis of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. We are grateful to the United Nations Secretary-General for his readiness to participate in that meeting.

We back the proposal of the Secretary-General to extend the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for another 12 months. It is important that the United Nations continue to play a central role in coordinating international efforts for a post-conflict settlement in and the socio-economic recovery of Afghanistan.

Russia is interested in turning Afghanistan into a democratic, stable and flourishing State. We have promoted that objective with practical actions. With the assistance of our country, over 140 facilities in the fields of industry, infrastructure, transport and communications have been set up. In other fields, including the training of professional staff, joint projects are being undertaken today. Russia provides the friendly Afghan people with humanitarian assistance, and we will continue that assistance.

Mr. Takasu (Japan): I wish first to thank Special Representative Kai Eide for his very interesting briefing this afternoon. A year ago in this Chamber, the Council discussed the need for strong leadership for the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan and welcomed Mr. Eide's appointment. The Council then identified the priorities for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and gave it a stronger role in coordinating the international efforts in the country. We highly appreciate the efforts of Mr. Eide and the dedicated staff of UNAMA, and wish to assure them of our strong support.

When we look at the situation in Afghanistan, we tend to see the glass as half empty. We should recognize, however, that steady progress has been made in the face of daunting challenges. To name but a few positive steps during the reporting period, we have seen improvements in civil-military coordination, a continued decrease in poppy production, and renewed momentum in the reform of the police and the Ministry of Interior. Mr. Eide referred to many other positive developments.

Acknowledging such progress by no means suggests that we can afford to slacken our pace; rather, we must redouble our efforts in order to focus on the serious challenges, in particular improving the security situation and strengthening the national security capacity. In addressing those challenges, the international community and the Afghan Government must coordinate closely with one another, with a strong emphasis on ownership by the Government and people of Afghanistan.

For the past few months, many Governments have been reviewing strategies to explore how we can best assist Afghanistan. Many of them, including Japan, have appointed special representatives for assistance to Afghanistan and Pakistan to coordinate and discuss the way forward with other partners from the perspective of the regional approach and to address Afghanistan and the neighbouring area as a whole in a comprehensive context. Those moves are welcome, as they reflect the continuing and ever-growing commitment of the international community to the stability of Afghanistan.

In this context, we welcome the forthcoming international conference on Afghanistan on 31 March, to be hosted by the United Nations, opened by the Secretary-General and chaired by the Special Representative, together with the Governments of Afghanistan and the Netherlands. We hope that the conference will provide an opportunity for countries concerned to share their strategies and agree on the future course of common action. I am certain that, at the conference, the essential role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in coordinating the efforts of international actors on the ground will be stressed in order to formulate common strategy.

The most important political event of the year is the presidential election. It is crucial that the upcoming elections be successful in order to consolidate peace and democracy in Afghanistan. We are pleased that the registration process was conducted smoothly, and we pay tribute to the efforts and decisions of the authorities and people of the country. We must ensure that the entire electoral process is fair, smooth and credible, with the widest possible popular participation and observed by international monitors. We respect the prudent choice of the Afghan people and are confident that the Special Representative will make himself available to provide necessary advice and support.

In discussing the strategy, the regional dimension is an important factor. Afghanistan's stability and prosperity hinge upon the stability of its neighbours, such as Pakistan and Central Asian countries. Japan is pleased to host a meeting of the friends of democratic Pakistan group and the Pakistan donors conference in Tokyo in mid-April. The international community should spare no effort in supporting the region as a whole, politically as well as financially.

As we enter a critical phase for the future of Afghanistan, Japan is committed to remaining a staunch supporter of the country's endeavours. To steadily implement the pledge of $2 billion we made in Paris and to meet the urgent needs of Afghanistan, we will disburse $300 million by the end of this month, including in support of the presidential election and assistance equivalent to six months' salary for all 80,000 Afghan police officers to meet the pressing need for police reform.

I agree with the Special Representative that stability cannot take root without economic development and capacity-building. To that end, Japan has assisted in the construction of infrastructure, including more than 650 kilometres of roads and the recently opened terminal building of Kabul International Airport. Japan places priority on agriculture and rural development. We have also prioritized education, as noted by the Special Representative, and the results of our support include the construction or restoration of 500 schools and the training of 10,000 teachers. I can assure the Council that our assistance is not limited to certain areas. We intend to expand our assistance in these fields.

Before concluding, let me reiterate the important role of the United Nations in Afghanistan. With international attention focused closely on the country, expectations for the role of the United Nations are higher than ever. A few months ago, Member States

gave UNAMA increased resources to implement its strengthened role. We look forward to tangible progress in the country, facilitated through coordination by the United Nations Mission and the strong leadership of the Special Representative.

Japan, as the lead country on Afghanistan in the Council, is pleased to submit a draft resolution extending the mandate of UNAMA for a further 12 months. It is our sincere hope that the Council will reaffirm its unwavering support for the United Nations Mission by adopting the draft resolution unanimously in the next few days.

Mr. Mayr-Harting (Austria): I, too, wish to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kai Eide, for his briefing to the Council today. We greatly appreciate his personal commitment, which he has shown again today, and the leadership that he provides at the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I would also like to welcome the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Tanin, to this table.

We align ourselves with the statement that will be made later in this debate by the Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union. Let me also say that we support the recommendation to extend UNAMA's mandate for a further 12 months with a view to fully implementing its mandate in all its aspects.

For Afghanistan, the elections to be held in August are a very important — indeed, essential — step in the democratic process of State-building. For the first time, Afghan authorities have the primary responsibility for organizing the elections. We welcome the successful completion of the voter registration process; it will be of critical importance to ensuring a fair, transparent and credible election process, and UNAMA's assistance will play a very important role in that.

The ongoing reform efforts in the area of governance are also very relevant, and we are grateful to the Special Representative for drawing our attention to some of these very positive developments today. The reform of the Ministry of Interior and of the Afghanistan National Police could have a positive effect on a number of serious challenges to security on the ground, including the creation of a positive security environment for the elections, respect for the rule of law, the fight against corruption, and counter-narcotics efforts. Austria is currently examining the possibility of contributing to the police cooperation and demining activities of the United Nations.

Another important development mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2009/135) and by the Special Representative is the decrease in poppy cultivation. We wish to commend the Afghan authorities and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for that achievement, which needs to be further consolidated. We also welcome the intensification of the activities of the International Security Assistance Force in the fight against the illegal processing and trafficking of drugs. Opium production in Afghanistan remains a challenge, and it is clear that is linked to the security situation and to the corruption phenomenon. It is of particular importance to ensure the sustainability of alternative livelihoods. Furthermore, the regional dimension of drug production and trade needs to be tackled. This is being addressed, inter alia, under UNODC's "rainbow strategy" — a programme that my Government supports.

Regional cooperation is crucial to the stabilization of Afghanistan. All of Afghanistan's neighbours need to be included in this process. We welcome the new positive trend in economic and political cooperation, in particular the renewed relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and encourage UNAMA to provide further support to regional cooperation, in accordance with its mandate.

We share the concerns expressed about the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan and the intensification of the conflict, in some areas at least. The impact of the conflict on civilians is of particular concern. Anti-Government elements pose the greatest threat to the civilian population in Afghanistan. The situation of civilians is made worse by attacks on non-governmental organizations and humanitarian workers. We are also extremely worried about recent attacks on schools. The prevention of attacks on children — in particular, putting an end to the targeting of girls — has to be a top priority. The ongoing recruitment of children by the Taliban and the use of children as suicide bombers are also of great concern and need to be stopped.

We welcome the serious efforts undertaken by pro-Government forces during past months to reduce the impact of their operations on civilians and the enhanced cooperation with the Afghan Government in

that regard. We hope that these efforts will be effective in reducing civilian casualties. Further efforts to minimize civilian casualties would be of critical relevance.

We value the work of the human rights unit of UNAMA and believe that the Mission's mandate to monitor the situation of civilians, to coordinate efforts to ensure their protection and to assist in the full implementation of human rights is an important aspect of UNAMA's work. Equally important is the strengthening of national institutions, in particular the judiciary, and full support for the work of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. Special attention has to be given to the issue of human rights in the administration of justice, including the improvement of conditions in detention.

In recent months, as has been mentioned today, there has been an increase in violence against women, including against women working for the police, provincial councils and local government. This trend is clearly worrying in the light of the forthcoming elections. We are convinced that women's rights have to be a priority in Afghanistan, and thus also in the protection mandate of UNAMA.

In conclusion, let me assure the Council of Austria's full support for the commitments made in Paris in June 2008. We need to work together to enable UNAMA to perform its critical task of coordinating international civilian activities in Afghanistan in an effective manner. I must say that what the Special Representative had to say on that subject today was particularly impressive; it is clear that coordination is particularly important. At a time when overall financial developments make international contributions even more difficult, coordination becomes ever more important.

We also need to enhance Afghan ownership by way of capacity-building and by complementing the efforts of the people of Afghanistan themselves, because one thing is certainly clear: whatever the international community undertakes has to be done in very close cooperation with — and for — Afghanistan and the people of Afghanistan.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey): I would first like to thank Special Representative Kai Eide for his interesting and comprehensive briefing. I also welcome our colleague Ambassador Tanin, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan.

We very much appreciate the leading role of the United Nations in coordinating the efforts of the international community to assist Afghanistan. We express our full support for the endeavours of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in that direction.

Afghanistan today is still passing through a critical period. This period brings to the fore both challenges and opportunities, which are in fact well defined in the Secretary-General's report (S/2009/135). We fully agree with his observations and recommendations.

Actually, there is not much divergence within the international community as to what needs to be done in Afghanistan to achieve our common objectives. But we are still not where we want to be. For that, resolute and concerted efforts are needed at the local, regional and international levels. Given the critical period ahead of us and the broad consensus on the way forward, it is now high time to step up to the occasion and deliver the expectations of Afghanistan.

While doing so, we should always bear in mind that any further deterioration in that country would have broad adverse effects reaching beyond Afghanistan. Therefore, we must not be dismayed by occasional setbacks and must always keep a clear perspective as to what we can and should achieve collectively. We must do so in a way that will further strengthen the hopes and expectations of the Afghan people. After all, we should not forget that, unless we win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people, peace and stabilization will always be a distant objective.

In that regard, there is certainly a need for a comprehensive approach to be put in place, encompassing security, governance, the rule of law, human rights and social and economic development. All these aspects are interlinked and, hence, the following four areas of priority deserve equal and special attention: comprehensive economic development with a visible impact on the living conditions of the people; a strong Afghan military and police to take the lead and assert ownership of the nation's security; inclusive national reconciliation that will consolidate peace and stability in the country; and a modern education and justice system to effectively combat extremism of all sorts.

Furthermore, in the immediate future, the presidential elections to be held in August will also be

of critical importance. Those elections should help the democratic process in the country rather than creating new fault lines. For that, the elections should be well prepared and should be carried out in a free and fair manner. Needless to say, the United Nations has an important role to play in this regard, and we support UNAMA's efforts to that end.

Likewise, regional cooperation is also a must to accomplish our goals in Afghanistan. In the light of recent promising developments in this context, especially with respect to Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, the international community should encourage and help regional cooperation and the joint endeavours of those countries.

As a country which has special ties with the region, Turkey has contributed and will be contributing to the improvement of the situation in Afghanistan in every way it can. Apart from our continued support for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the sizeable reconstruction assistance provided through our Provincial Reconstruction Team in Wardak, a multifaceted, extensive assistance programme is under way. In this context, in 2008, we doubled our pledge of development assistance to Afghanistan to $200 million. Hence, we will focus on more visible projects of direct impact, such as establishing a new university, building a modern training and research hospital and paving roads of Kabul.

We decided to contribute €1.5 million to the Afghan National Army trust fund. Our existing training programmes, both in Turkey and in Wardak, designed to support the Afghan National Police will continue. We will also contribute a total of $5 million for the elections in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, as part of our efforts to enhance regional cooperation, the Turkey-Pakistan-Afghanistan trilateral process is geared towards helping develop closer relations and mutually beneficial cooperation among those countries. In April 2007, Turkey hosted the first trilateral summit with the participation of the Presidents of Afghanistan and Pakistan, which culminated in Ankara Declaration. A joint working group was established at the Ankara summit to work on various cooperation projects. The second trilateral summit was held in Istanbul on 5 December 2008. The process has already come a long way and we are committed to take it further. In this framework, we intend to host a third summit.

In conclusion, I would like to underline once again that failure in Afghanistan is unthinkable. We must succeed, and we are confident that we will. Indeed, the sense of purpose and dedication around this table and within the international community at large gives us every reason to be optimistic. We also believe that the high-level meetings to be held in Moscow and in The Hague later this month will provide us with excellent opportunities to demonstrate our collective will and commitment once again.

Turkey is more than ready and willing to join in this endeavour and to do its fair share. In other words, we will not stop assisting the brotherly Afghan people in their struggle to carry their country forward. After so many decades of conflict, they deserve to live in democracy, peace, prosperity and stability. We have full confidence in the determination, resilience and wisdom of the Afghan people in their struggle to achieve that goal.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): I wish to join previous speakers in thanking Mr. Kai Eide, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his briefing. I would also like to welcome the presence of our colleague, the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, at this meeting.

The reports are clear. The situation in Afghanistan is still of great concern both at the security and political levels and in the economic field. Despite the unprecedented mobilization of the international community in support of the efforts of the Afghan Government, peace and stability remain elusive. The Security Council was able to become fully aware of that during the important mission that it conducted there in November 2008. The boldness and brazenness of the insurgents and the resurgence of suicide attacks are challenges that need to be met, particularly at a time when the country is preparing to undertake presidential and provincial elections. As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2009/135) notes, the number of incidents compared with the previous year increased by 42 per cent in December 2008 and by 75 per cent in January 2009, which is a negative trend, not to say the opposite of what is sought by the efforts of the international community to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The question is how credible, uncontestable elections can be organized when insecurity and fear risk excluding from the process a significant part of the population as no census has been held. The Afghan political class should, therefore, act as quickly as possible to organize and above all achieve national reconciliation, including by strengthening political dialogue. For its part, the Afghan Government has already committed itself to that approach by establishing a dialogue with those moderate insurgents who are ready to respect the Afghan constitution, renounce violence and accept the rules of democracy.

We highly welcome those noble efforts. We should encourage the Government in its struggle against corruption, the real cancer at the heart of the political and economic governance system, which will hinder any recovery effort until it is removed. We must also congratulate the Government on its decision to organize elections on 20 August, although such a decision was not easy given the high stakes. In that regard, we welcome the technical assistance of the United Nations and of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the strengthening of international troop levels to boost the capacity of the Afghan forces to secure the electoral process and make possible a dialogue with the opposition in a climate of trust.

The economic situation in Afghanistan equally deserves special attention. We advocate maintaining a cohesive approach in implementing the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. While still modest, the progress recorded in reducing poppy cultivation — a key element of the Strategy — and the prospects for the agricultural sector are encouraging. We call on donors, as well as international partners, to mobilize additional funds to help meet the challenges in priority sectors such as agriculture, energy and infrastructure. However, appropriate steps must be taken to ensure that that assistance benefits the development and the well-being of the people of Afghanistan.

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is still an issue of concern. We welcome the measures already undertaken to tackle it, including the establishment of a new United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Afghanistan, supported by a humanitarian action plan that will soon be operational. Likewise, we once again urge the international community to step up its mobilization to help the Afghan people overcome the food crisis and to alleviate their suffering.

The other major concern remains the continuing human rights violations, in particular extrajudicial executions and sexual violence and discrimination against women and girls, whose status remains vulnerable. We call for more rigorous implementation of the Action Plan for Peace, Reconciliation and Justice.

Lastly, it is worth noting the significant asset that international and regional cooperation represent for Afghanistan. That is demonstrated by the agreement with Uzbekistan on the provision of electricity and by the forthcoming Regional Economic Cooperation Conference, to be held in Islamabad in April, which will consider Afghanistan's various priority projects. In terms of political cooperation, we welcome the new vision adopted with Pakistan to fight against extremism and terrorism, and we note the need to establish a dialogue with opposition groups.

Regarding UNAMA, we reiterate its crucial role, which must be to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan. That is why, for it to carry out its mission successfully, we are in favour of extending its mandate, as recommended by the Secretary-General.

In conclusion, we reaffirm our belief in the primary role that the United Nations must play in restoring peace in Afghanistan and in ensuring its economic recovery and national reconstruction.

Mr. Bui The Giang (Viet Nam): I join other Council members in thanking the Secretary-General for his report (S/2009/135) and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kai Eide, for his important updated briefing on the situation in Afghanistan. I also welcome Ambassador Tanin to the Council.

More than seven years since the overthrow of the Taliban regime, a new Afghanistan has emerged. Thanks to the convergence of the committed, generous efforts from the international community and the resilience of the Afghan people, certain progress has been made in a number of areas, promising possible subsequent positive results in coordinating security activities, tightening poppy production control, increasing agricultural output, implementing the Mine Action Programme and cooperating with the outside world, first of all with neighbouring countries.

However, we remain deeply concerned about the continued deterioration of peace and security and the acutely difficulties faced by the population of Afghanistan, as most notably reflected by the fact that 2008 was the most violent year since 2001, with more casualties and suffering inflicted upon the Afghan people, especially women and children. That is in addition to the many other challenges described in the Secretary-General's report.

We therefore share the view that there can be no purely military solution to these challenges. Instead, an integrated approach and a comprehensive vision are required, involving several key factors. In that connection, we share many points raised by the Secretary-General in his report and by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in his briefing, and we wish to emphasize that, in social and economic terms, it is essential to ensure the effective implementation, under the ownership of the Afghan people, of the Afghanistan Compact, the National Drug Control Strategy and, especially, the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, which identifies agriculture, energy and infrastructure as priority areas. Moreover, improving social welfare, including health care and education services, should continue to be among the main priorities of the Government of Afghanistan. In that process, it is important that the Afghan authorities and people are provided with the necessary assistance to enhance their capacity and proactive participation both in decision-making and in implementing projects and programmes thereby helping increase aid effectiveness.

In the political field, reconciliation, while not an end in itself, needs to be part of an inclusive political process in Afghanistan. We call on the leaders of Afghanistan to place peace and the political stability of their country at the centre of all calculations, overcome divisions, renounce violence and advance dialogue and cooperation in the common interests of the country.

As this year is a critical test for Afghanistan, especially with the presidential elections scheduled for August, we welcome all efforts by the international community to further support the country. We commend the upcoming special conferences on Afghanistan to be convened in Moscow and The Hague. We take special note of the recently strengthened regional cooperation in support of Afghanistan's economic, political and security improvement — especially the resumption of such regional initiatives as the Peace Jirga process — for we are convinced that the challenges in Afghanistan, interrelated and interconnected in nature as they are, demand a greater role and contribution on the part of regional partners in the quest for a comprehensive and sustainable solution.

We reaffirm our support for the leading role of the United Nations in coordinating international civilian activities in Afghanistan. After their timely allocation of additional financial, human and security resources to UNAMA for 2009, the General Assembly and its member States are looking to the Mission to make further progress on the ground. We support UNAMA in providing technical assistance, at the request of the Afghan authorities, for the pivotal upcoming elections and for continuing its coordination with other international donors, agencies and organizations to make the most of the available resources. At the same time, UNAMA should continue to intensify its cooperation with the Government of Afghanistan, as well as with relevant organizations and stakeholders, to fulfil its mandate.

So that UNAMA can carry out its duties in the current situation, we endorse the extension of its present mandate for another 12 months. We also welcome all measures and steps being taken to avoid casualties among civilians, who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the peace process.

It is high time for the Afghan people to bear responsibility for their own future. We expect that, with renewed regional and international support, the coming presidential elections will be conducted in a free, fair and secure environment, thus paving the way for the restoration of peace and security, which the country so deserves. We sincerely wish the people and the Government of Afghanistan every success in that process, to which Viet Nam, for its part, stands ready to contribute positively and constructively.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation would like to thank Special Representative Eide for his briefing.

Today, after more than seven years of war, Afghanistan finds itself at a new crossroads. The developments in that country have attracted the world's attention. On the one hand, the security situation continues its downward slide, causing heavy civilian casualties and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. On the other hand, the international community, including

the United Nations, has increased its attention and input with regard to Afghanistan.

At the Paris Conference last June, the international community reaffirmed its support for the national reconstruction of Afghanistan and for the core coordinating role of the United Nations in assisting the country. Despite the current and future difficulties facing Afghanistan, we have no reason to lose confidence. This year's election will be a major event in the political life of the country. Afghanistan's Independent Electoral Commission recently reconfirmed the date of 20 August for the presidential election. We believe that the Afghan people will be able to use their wisdom to appropriately address election-related issues and, through the election, increase social cohesion and improve the effectiveness of the Government's functioning.

It is particularly important to ensure a secure environment for the election. We hope that the increase in the numbers of troops from the countries concerned will help to ease the security situation in Afghanistan. We also hope that, with the assistance of the international community, the Government, the Afghan security forces and the Afghanistan National Police will continue to build their capacities so that they can soon take up the heavy responsibility of maintaining national security and social stability.

Experience has shown that military means alone cannot reverse the situation in Afghanistan. In the long run, it is essential to encourage various ethnic groups and factions to achieve reconciliation through dialogue. At the same time, in carrying out military action, the parties concerned should take care to reduce civilian casualties.

With a view to responding effectively to security concerns, Special Representative Eide and the Afghan Government have proposed to take an integrated approach and undertake different targeted measures in different areas of Afghanistan. In the northern and western parts of the country, where the situation is relatively stable, the focus will be on developing the economy, whereas in the south and east the focus will be on strengthening security.

In our view, promoting economic development in the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan is just as important as stabilizing the security situation, especially since those are the areas in which poppy cultivation is most concentrated. It is only by vigorously developing alternative-crop cultivation and promoting economic growth that poppy cultivation can be further reduced, thus diminishing the root causes of social instability in the country. We call on the international community to further increase its support for Afghanistan's agricultural production.

At the initiative of a number of countries, an international conference on the question of Afghanistan will be held in The Hague on 31 March to discuss the direction of the country's future development. We wish the conference success and hope that the parties concerned will reach agreement on such issues as stabilizing the security situation and promoting economic development and will point out a clear direction for the next phase of work in assisting Afghanistan. We have also noted that the countries members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will be holding a meeting in Moscow, and we wish that meeting success also.

We support the continued leading role of the United Nations in coordinating the international community's assistance to Afghanistan, and we support the extension of UNAMA's current mandate for another year. We are willing to continue to provide help to Afghanistan to the best of our abilities.

Ms. DiCarlo (United States of America): I would like to join others in welcoming Special Representative Eide to the Council today and to thank him for his briefing. My Government would like to express its deep gratitude to him for his efforts to help stabilize Afghanistan. His leadership and commitment remain critical to the implementation of the expanded mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We congratulate him and the staff of UNAMA and offer them our full support.

I would also like to welcome Ambassador Tanin today. I would like to assure him of the commitment of the United States to a stable and secure Afghanistan and of our continued cooperation.

The United Nations, NATO and other contributors all have important roles to play in making Afghanistan more secure, helping to build the capacities of its Government, strengthening its justice system and expanding the reach of economic opportunity. My Government strongly supports UNAMA's leadership in coordinating international aid efforts and improving cooperation between civilian and military operations.

We also welcome the decision of the General Assembly to provide the crucial resources UNAMA needs to fulfil its mandate. Approving UNAMA's 2009 budget of $168 million and giving it the authority to hire 437 new staff members and expand to four new offices this year were important steps. But we have to do more together.

My Government urges the United Nations to speed up the process of funding to UNAMA and we encourage Member States to provide highly qualified staff to help fill these new staff positions. UNAMA's role is critical, and, of course, we strongly support the renewal of its mandate.

I would like to touch on several of the issues raised in the Secretary-General's report (S/2009/135). The United States agrees with the conclusion that the problem of the Taliban's resurgence and the spread of extremism in the region cannot be solved by military means alone. Civilian assistance is critical to success in Afghanistan. We are therefore encouraged by the formation of the integrated approach working group, and we look forward to hearing about its progress in delivering aid and completing needs assessments.

The United States sees the upcoming elections as the key strategic event in Afghanistan this year. We support an open, fair election in which the Afghan people can choose their own leaders, free from intimidation. We appreciate the efforts made by the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan, the United Nations, international donors and security forces and Afghan security services to confront the difficult challenges in preparing for the upcoming voting. The United States supports the Commission's decision to hold the elections on 20 August in order to maximize the fairness, transparency and universality of the voting. We call upon Afghanistan's leaders to find a solution within their constitutional framework that will ensure the continuity, legitimacy and stability of their Government throughout the election process.

We must also move urgently to ensure that the elections are properly funded. The Commission has presented a budget of $224 million to give the voting process the resources it will require. We urge donors to follow through on their pledges as soon as possible.

There will be no sustained progress in Afghanistan no matter how many troops are deployed or how much money is spent if we do not make substantial progress on increasing the country's capacity for good governance. First and foremost, such actions must come from the Government and the people of Afghanistan. But we will continue to work together with them to provide ongoing support here.

Corruption remains one of the primary concerns of the Afghan people. It undermines efforts to help build an impartial, fair Government that delivers services to all citizens equally, without regard for their wealth or connections. We need to see progress from the Afghan Government in fighting corruption, expanding the reach of the central Government, strengthening local governments and creating economic opportunity.

We also share the concerns raised in the report about the deteriorating human rights situation in Afghanistan. We are particularly concerned by the harm that discriminatory laws and practices are causing to women and children. While we are encouraged by the steps that the Afghan Government has taken to implement the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan, we are in full agreement that much more needs to be done. The United States has trained more than 3,000 Afghan women as teachers over the past year, and we continue to support higher education for women through our programmes at the University of Kabul. We are also helping to train more than 22,000 women to help carry out the upcoming elections. We welcome the views of the Special Representative about how UNAMA and the international community might cooperate better with the Afghan Government to meet the needs of women and girls for education, health care, economic opportunity, justice and a chance to lead.

We are encouraged by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime forecast of a possible further decrease in opium cultivation in 2009, as steep a drop as 30 per cent, according to these United Nations estimates. But the drug threat in Afghanistan remains unacceptably high. It will require a long-term commitment by both the Government of Afghanistan and the international community for us to meet this challenge. We are particularly concerned by the deteriorating security conditions in the south, where the insurgency now dominates and where 98 per cent of Afghanistan's poppies are now grown.

I must address the issue of civilian casualties. The United States, our NATO allies and our coalition partners deeply regret any loss of civilian life. International forces in Afghanistan take extraordinary

measures to avoid civilian casualties, in sharp contrast to the Taliban, who deliberately attack and endanger civilians. The International Security Assistance Force issued a directive last December specifically aimed at reducing the number of civilian casualties resulting from its operations. I want to stress that our goal is to avoid casualties. When events that may involve civilians occur, joint Afghan and international teams move quickly to investigate and, where appropriate, compensate victims.

Finally, we appreciate the role of the United Nations in co-chairing the forthcoming 31 March International Conference on Afghanistan, along with the Governments of Afghanistan and the Netherlands. We look forward to reaffirming the broad international consensus on supporting Afghanistan, as embodied in the Afghanistan Compact of 2006, and we particularly look forward to a productive dialogue on ways to provide aid more effectively, to help meet the Afghan Government's priorities. These are improved security, better governance and more robust economic growth.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to extend France's condolences to the families of the victims of the attack that today killed the Afghan member of parliament Dad Mohammad Khan and four other individuals. France firmly condemns this assassination.

The Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic will later make a statement on behalf of the European Union, with which France, of course, associates itself. At this stage, I would like to make a few additional comments.

As others have done before me, I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Kai Eide for his briefing and in particular for the untiring efforts he has undertaken since his appointment to ensure better overall cohesiveness in the international community's work in Afghanistan under United Nations auspices. These efforts are beginning to bear fruit.

The international community firmly reiterated its support to the people and Government of Afghanistan in June 2008 in Paris. The following Moscow and The Hague conferences will provide us with an opportunity to reiterate this common and lasting commitment and to take stock of the implementation of commitments undertaken and of the priorities for the coming months.

These conferences are part of the general trend of increased involvement by the international community. This momentum is something that the Special Representative has done a great deal to nurture by actively contributing to the implementation of the comprehensive approach, which brought together political, security, reconstruction and development efforts.

I would highlight in particular the essential issue of aid effectiveness and coordination, where progress unfortunately remains insufficient. The most pressing issue in this regard is transparency in terms of aid. To ensure that the United Nations is able to carry out its coordination mission, it must be able ensure that it and the Afghan authorities are in a position to have a clear overall picture of the efforts of all donors. This is something the Special Representative referred to earlier.

The United Nations must also continue, through its Special Representative, to symbolize the voice of the international community to the Afghan authorities and people. Mr. Eide has been successful in playing this role in an impartial manner. He has addressed a number of difficult topics such as good governance, corruption, human rights and the problem of civilian victims with the political, democratic authorities and civil society in Afghanistan and with international stakeholders.

I would like to again reiterate France's full confidence in Mr. Eide in the period leading up to the elections, which is particularly critical to the democratic future of the country.

The upcoming presidential and legislative elections are in fact a major step in the process of Afghans taking ownership of their own democracy. All Afghan political officials must work to ensure the conduct of free and fair elections throughout the country and to preserve stability and security throughout the electoral process. The United Nations has an important role to play, at both the technical and the political levels, to help them.

But the elections should not distract us from the other pressing problems facing Afghanistan. The Special Representative has drawn up a convincing list of these. Significant progress has been achieved in various fields over the past year, progress that now needs to be consolidated. In the field of security, the Afghan National Army has been considerably

strengthened and is increasingly in a position to take over from international forces.

The police remain the weak point in the security system. Since his appointment as Interior Minister, Mr. Atmar has started an in-depth reform of the police that the international community must back via initiatives in keeping with the stakes. France is committed to participating actively with its European partners in this effort.

Encouraging developments have also taken place in the fight against drug trafficking. They remain to be confirmed, including in the fight against the diversion of the chemical precursors of heroin, which is subject of resolution 1817 (2008).

The situation in the field of human rights is a serious topic of concern, especially because of the increase in attacks against the media and civil society. Significant progress made since 2001 remains precarious. The authorities must, with the assistance of the international community, act more firmly to guarantee journalists and representatives of civil society conditions that enable them to engage in their activities freely and safely.

I would also like to reiterate our concerns regarding the issue of civilian casualties, which — we need to underscore this point — are mainly the result of deliberate attacks by the Taliban and other extremist groups that display thereby their absolute disdain for human life. At the same time, France is aware of the need to continue, with its partners and its allies, significant efforts achieved by Government and international forces to avoid civilian casualties.

The President of the French Republic, Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy, has reiterated on numerous occasions the priority that the stabilization of Afghanistan and the region as a whole has for France. Over the past two years, France has carried out a major reinforcement of its military commitment in Afghanistan. Anxious to ensure that we have a comprehensive approach, we have also significantly strengthened our civilian and political commitment since 2008. But over and above that, the depth of the Afghan crisis, the evolution of the international commitment and the increasing interrelations among the problems that affect Afghanistan and its neighbours have led France to further integrate the regional aspects of the problem in its approach.

It is in this context that the President of the Republic, on 26 February, appointed a Member of Parliament, Mr. Pierre Lellouche, as his Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. This decision is in line with France's belief that the Afghan crisis cannot be dealt with in isolation from the situation in the region, and primarily in Pakistan. Our priorities are to promote the emergence of a stable, prosperous and democratic Afghanistan, to contribute to the stabilization of democratic Pakistan and to reduce the terrorist threat of which this region has become the epicentre.

It is also to lend political momentum to the theme of strengthening regional cooperation that our Foreign Minister, Mr. Bernard Kouchner, invited Afghanistan, its neighbouring States and the key cooperation partners of the international community to France in December 2008 for a ministerial meeting, held in La Celle Saint-Cloud under the co-chairmanship of the United Nations. We welcome the will demonstrated by Afghanistan and its neighbours during this meeting to make concrete progress to strengthen their cooperation against drug trafficking and terrorism, as well as to develop regional economic cooperation. We hope that the positive trends in relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan will contribute to achieving concrete results during the upcoming Regional Economic Cooperation Conference in Islamabad.

UNAMA will have to face many challenges in the coming year. It will require our full support. I therefore welcome the proposal to hold Security Council meetings every three months. That will enable the Council to provide more active follow-up to the implementation of the mandate entrusted to UNAMA and thereby to provide more effective support for the action of the Special Representative.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, I would first like to thank Mr. Kai Eide, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, for presenting the latest report of the Secretary-General on the situation in that country (S/2009/135) and for his remarks regarding the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Tanin, for attending this meeting.

Mexico finds that the elections process to take place next August in Afghanistan is both a major

challenge and an opportunity to achieve peace and a political solution to a conflict that has been going on for over eight years now. The elections should herald a new chapter for national reconciliation and strengthening sovereignty and democracy in Afghanistan.

That is why we support the work of the Independent Electoral Commission and we hope that elections take place in a free, impartial and transparent fashion, in an atmosphere of security that will guarantee the rights of the Afghan people. We call on the United Nations system, and especially the Mission in Afghanistan, to redouble their efforts and work with the Electoral Commission, political parties, civil society and other actors to encourage successful elections this year.

Mexico believes that ensuring the security of the population in the framework of the rule of law is one of the main challenges that Afghanistan faces in the short and medium term. The report is very clear in this regard, bearing in mind the deterioration of the situation in this area and the extremist violence that is spreading in various regions. It is unfortunate that there is an upsurge of victims in the civilian population, and we trust that greater cooperation between the Afghan armed forces and the international forces will make itself felt through a reduction of damage to civilians and an improvement of the general security situation in the country.

Once again, we emphatically reject terrorism in all its forms and expressions. We condemn the attacks on innocent persons and express our condolences to the families of the victims of the terrorist attacks and to the people and the Government of Afghanistan.

For Mexico, the security of humanitarian workers and of the most vulnerable sectors of the population, such as children, calls for priority attention, in accordance with the standards and principles of international humanitarian law. Specifically, we believe that all measures should be taken to prevent the recruitment of children by armed groups and ensure their return to a safe environment.

Moreover, we recognize the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan and the international community to move forward in the removal and destruction of mines, other types of explosives and remnants of war in the country. Nevertheless, these artifacts continue to be a serious threat to the civilian population. For this reason, additional support should be given to demining programmes.

We commend the efforts undertaken by the Government to reform various ministries and police forces and to reduce and fight against corruption. These efforts contribute to the institutional normalization of the country and to building the population's confidence in its authorities.

The fight against drug production and trafficking is another priority area for Afghanistan's stability. We are gratified to see that the Government's efforts to bring down production in several provinces are starting to show positive results. In this area, cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the regional focus on the problem are of particular importance.

We agree with the Secretary-General that UNAMA has the appropriate mandate to play a role in coordinating the various efforts to promote stability and development in Afghanistan. The additional resources approved for the Mission will enable it to strengthen its institutional capacity and extend its presence in several areas of the country. The establishment of an office of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is therefore timely, and we trust that the Mission will continue to strengthen its activities in the field of human rights protection.

Stability in Afghanistan does not depend solely on the success of military and security actions. In line with national priorities, a comprehensive approach should be maintained, which will strengthen institutional capacity-building and promote socio-economic development. This should take into account the regional dimension of a number of problems affecting the country.

The international conferences that will take place in a few days in The Hague and in Moscow, where the situation in Afghanistan and its linkage with neighbouring States will be discussed, are a clear demonstration of the firm commitment of the international community to the country. Based on that comprehensive approach and regional view, it will be possible to reach a long-term solution that will be consistent with the efforts made by the Government of Afghanistan.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to begin by thanking Mr. Kai Eide, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his briefing and for the wealth of information he has provided the Council this afternoon. I also welcome the presence of Ambassador Tanin; it is a pleasure to have him among us today.

For eight years the United Nations has been strongly supporting the Afghan people and their efforts to build a durable democracy, promote socio-economic development and achieve sustainable peace. Challenges remain today, and a difficult security situation may be expected in the coming months. It is important that the international community maintain and strengthen its commitment to Afghanistan. Today, my delegation recognizes the prime role of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and the priorities established at the Paris Conference as the foundation for peacebuilding and development for the Afghan people.

As the Special Representative said, the situation in Afghanistan calls for a comprehensive approach and a national vision. Besides military measures, this should include the promotion of good governance, the rule of law and development and economic growth opportunities for the population. We also believe that the Government and the people of Afghanistan should claim ownership of the processes to achieve those ends and that international efforts should be strengthened to improve security conditions and the capacities of the Afghan authorities in those areas.

The presidential elections to take place in August will be a key step towards strengthening democracy in Afghanistan, and the international community must support and be engaged in that process. My delegation welcomes the establishment, as part of the UNAMA political component, of an office which will work with political actors to guarantee a favourable climate for free, impartial and broadly participatory elections. Among other positive signs, we recognize the forecasted reduction in poppy production for 2009, progress in security sector reform and the continuing improvement in political relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

My delegation is concerned by the increase in civilian casualties, the attacks against humanitarian personnel and schools and the use of civilians as human shields. In particular, we deplore the fact that children continue to be principal victims of the escalating conflict and that there are still attempts by armed groups to recruit children. We call on all parties to exert greater efforts to adopt measures to reduce civilian casualties to a minimum, in accordance with international humanitarian law, international human rights norms and Security Council resolutions 1746 (2007) and 1806 (2008).

Costa Rica would like to see that concern reflected in the draft resolution that is being negotiated. The Council cannot allow UNAMA, the International Security Assistance Force or the Afghan authorities to be weakened by leaving out a commitment to protect civilian victims of the conflict, in particular victims of the insurgents. Still in the area of human rights, my delegation trusts that greater efforts will be made to protect women and to implement other gender policies.

Finally, we highlight the work of UNAMA in coordinating the efforts of the international community. We agree with the Secretary-General that the coordination of those efforts under UNAMA's leadership is indispensable to achieve the objectives set forth in the mandate. We reiterate our support for UNAMA and support the recommendation of the Secretary-General that its mandate be renewed for 12 months.

Sir John Sawers (United Kingdom): I begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his report (S/2009/135) and Special Representative Eide for his briefing today, which painted a picture which we recognize: a difficult security and humanitarian situation, but with some encouraging signs of progress being made in areas such as the administration of the elections, the performance of the key ministries, counter-narcotics and civilian-military cooperation.

It is often said that every year is a crucial year for Afghanistan, and that is probably even more true this year than it usually is, because not only do we have the presidential elections in August, but we have various other issues which are on the cusp. This year will determine whether we are going to move forward to achieve the goals of the international community or whether we are going to continue with the present insufficient degree of collective progress.

Successful and credible elections will be vital to Afghanistan's future. We welcome the agreement

reached on the August date and we urge Afghanistan's political leaders to reach consensus on the way to preserve stability and security in the run-up to the elections, which means stable government during that period.

We must avoid a situation of continued uncertainty and disagreement in Kabul during what may well prove to be another difficult summer with the insurgency in the south and the east of the country. Elections have to be prepared properly in order to ensure their credibility. The Special Representative has set out the bodies and mechanisms that are being established to support the electoral process. We are encouraged that the Independent Electoral Commission in Afghanistan was able to conduct the voter registration process successfully and relatively smoothly.

There is a crucial role being played by the United Nations Development Programme in providing technical support to enable the Afghans to run those elections, and the United Kingdom has provided more than £16 million in funding for that. We look to others to help address the current $100 million shortfall in the elections budget.

Aid coordination and effectiveness constitute another challenge facing Afghanistan this year and are at the heart of UNAMA's mandate. This was addressed in the Special Representative's briefing. It is vital that in 2009, international assistance to Afghanistan becomes greater than the sum of its parts. I took careful note of Mr. Eide's jibes against the international community for some of our failings on this, but we welcome the decision of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board to focus on five sectors, and UNAMA's efforts to identify priority projects and rally the donor community behind them. Equally important is UNAMA's work to develop a single Government database to track international contributions. There has been a major improvement in the mechanisms for aid effectiveness over the last year or so, and we paid tribute to the work that Mr. Eide and his team have done on that front.

Our ability to continue to deliver a comprehensive strategy depends in large part on civilian-military cooperation and coordination. UNAMA provides a link between the international civilian effort, the international military effort and the Afghan Government. This is not always an easy role to play, and we are well aware of the tensions that sometimes exist, but I commend UNAMA's work in this area, together with that of the International Security Assistance Force and the Afghan authorities, to deliver an integrated approach.

On civilian casualties, we all deeply regret them whenever they take place, and it is important that we continue to discuss the issue frankly and transparently. There is no doubt as to the damage that reports of civilian casualties do to perceptions of the international effort in Afghanistan, but no one should be in any doubt that those engaged in the international military effort make strenuous efforts to ensure that they do not occur, and we have tightened our rules of engagement to this end. Where they do occur, we have improved our investigation and reporting mechanisms.

In contrast, and as the Special Representative pointed out, the Afghan people and the international community in Afghanistan face an insurgency that does not care about civilian casualties. Civilians are used as shields and are now increasingly the target of deliberate attacks by the insurgents.

Despite all these challenges, we share the view of the Secretary-General and his Special Representative that there are grounds for optimism. One of those, as Mr. Eide set out, is the prognosis for poppy production in 2009, which is encouraging. If, as he cautiously predicted, we see a sharp decrease in overall production and a further increase in the number of poppy-free provinces, that would be a significant achievement.

Another reason for optimism is the increase in the resources available to UNAMA. For some time, there was a gap between the scope of UNAMA's mandate and the resources available to implement it. UNAMA's new budget, agreed last year, means that gap has now been closed, and we welcome the new posts that have been filled and the additional offices that are being opened.

However, this also means that expectations for UNAMA are even higher and that it will be expected to deliver even more. An important area of that delivery has already begun, as I have set out. The reality of Afghanistan in 2009 is that all of those involved in the international effort, including the United Nations, are going to have to up their game. We are confident that, in Kai Eide, UNAMA has the leadership in place to rise to that challenge.

Let me conclude by expressing the United Kingdom's appreciation for UNAMA's work over the past year. UNAMA's staff do vital work in difficult circumstances, and they and the Afghan people can count on the continued support of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jurica (Croatia): Let me thank Mr. Kai Eide for his briefing. In the same vein, I would like to pay tribute to Mr. Eide for his determined leadership and to all the staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for their genuine commitment and hard work undertaken in harsh circumstances. I also welcome the presence of Afghan Ambassador Tanin.

Croatia shares the concerns over the deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan, where insurgents, extremists and other radicals are attempting to destabilize previously calm areas and increasingly relying on asymmetric attacks and advanced methods of warfare. The direct targeting of international organizations and aid workers is yet another obvious indicator of the sort of enemy the Afghan Government and the international community are confronting. As stated in the Secretary-General's report (S/2009/135), most civilian casualties are the result of the actions of anti-Government elements, which are increasingly characterized by a total disregard for civilian lives.

There is a general consensus that this year will be crucial for Afghanistan in more than one aspect. The upcoming elections, scheduled for August, will be a real test of Afghanistan's democratic achievements. The elections should further stabilize the democratic process in the country and provide the highest demonstration of its legitimacy. By providing adequate technical assistance, financial contributions and additional security, the international community is doing its part to ensure free, fair, inclusive and transparent elections. We welcome the completion of the voter registration process, including in the most volatile provinces, without major incident, which we view as an important preparatory step in the electoral process.

The stability of Afghanistan is intrinsically linked to the stability of the region and cannot be achieved without genuine cooperation from its neighbours, especially Pakistan. In that context, we are heartened to see the revival of economic regional cooperation allowing for the restoration of extremely important energy and water supply lines. Furthermore, the resumption of the Peace Jirga process with Pakistan, as well as the recent meeting of the Tripartite Commission, testify to the intensifying political cooperation. We hope that the upcoming regional economic cooperation conference on Afghanistan will further strengthen relations between the countries of the region and yield concrete and practical results. We look forward to the international conferences on Afghanistan to be held in the nearest future in Moscow and The Hague.

Of course, there is no purely military solution to the problems in Afghanistan; the solution must therefore be of a political nature. In that regard, a comprehensive approach unifying military, political, humanitarian and development activities will be needed. Croatia highly values the so-called integrated approach aimed at making more effective use of civilian and military resources in the country. We find it extremely important to have the ability to perceive the specific challenges, problems and needs which are present in each and every part of that huge country, and to deploy the resources available in the most efficient and balanced way. Furthermore, we support stronger civilian-military coordination based on respect for each other's distinctive mandates and in accordance with Afghanistan's specific guidelines on the coordination of humanitarian and military actors.

Regarding aid coordination and ensuring aid effectiveness as one of the main roles that UNAMA should be playing in Afghanistan, we salute the Mission's follow-up on some of the benchmarks that the Special Representative presented to the Council at his last briefing in October 2008, especially on the development of a single Government database for information on donor contributions. We would like to see further action on some other achievable targets, particularly on the endeavour to set up a mechanism for joint audits in order to enhance accountability on each side, and on tangible, commonly agreed criteria to measure aid effectiveness.

My country welcomes the ongoing improvements in the Afghan National Army's performance, reflected, inter alia, in its ability to assume the lead responsibility for the security of the capital city, as well as in some of the provinces. Regarding the Afghanistan National Police, we strongly support the Focused District Development project. Finally, we see the fight against corruption as an important and integral part of all reform endeavours in Afghanistan, and we sincerely

trust that the increased efforts of the new minister in that regard will soon bear fruit.

Croatia received the *Afghanistan Opium Winter Rapid Assessment* report that was jointly released by the Ministry for Counter-Narcotics and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and welcomes projections of a possible further decrease in opium cultivation in 2009, as well as the continued increase in the number of poppy-free provinces. Additionally, we strongly support the regional counter-narcotics efforts being promoted by UNODC's "rainbow strategy", and we welcome the significant seizures of precursor chemicals in Iran, Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan through the implementation of resolution 1817 (2008).

Keeping the enormous humanitarian challenges in Afghanistan in mind, Croatia welcomes the establishment of an office of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Afghanistan and the development of the Humanitarian Action Plan. We welcome the significant refugee returns in 2008, as well as the completion of the first national profile of internally displaced persons.

Human rights and the rule of law continue to be a major challenge in Afghanistan. Allow me to mention here only two of the many long-standing problems that continue to weigh heavily on the country. The entrenched impunity of discriminatory practices, especially against women and girls – to mention but two – is a good example. We strongly support decisive actions in the field of the rule of law and human rights, and we deeply believe that determined action in these areas will help to promote the aforementioned conditions and trends.

Croatia welcomes the decision of the General Assembly to almost double UNAMA's budget in order to enable it to carry out its challenging mandate. We strongly support the renewal of the UNAMA mandate for a further year. We also support the request for the Secretary-General to provide more frequent reports on developments in Afghanistan, including adequate benchmarks for measuring and tracking progress in the implementation of UNAMA's mandate.

Finally, let me reiterate that, while fully cognizant of the challenges, Croatia stands ready, through its military presence and financial support, to continue to cooperate with the Afghan Government and international partners towards achieving the final goal of ensuring a stable, secure and peaceful Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

I wish to offer a few observations on the matter before us. First, I express our thanks to the Secretary-General for his detailed and comprehensive report (S/2009/135), on which we were just briefed by Mr. Kai Eide. I wish also to welcome the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan.

I commend the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), under Mr. Eide's leadership, for its efforts and excellent performance with the purpose of rebuilding that sisterly country despite all the security challenges the Mission faces.

Most of what is taking place in Afghanistan today is the responsibility of the international community, which neglected Afghanistan after the cold war. It is regrettable that, despite all the tragedies suffered by Afghanistan due to the civil war that raged for six years between 1990 and 1996, the Security Council took no action and adopted no resolutions attempting to put an end to the war and the fighting there.

Paragraph 2 of the report of the Secretary-General tells us that the situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating. The report gives several reasons for that, the most important among them being the lack of security and the fact that the results of Government and international assistance efforts have fallen short of the Afghan people's expectations. The report reaches the logical conclusion that the situation in Afghanistan cannot be addressed by military means alone, and it affirms the need for a political process based on comprehensive national reconciliation, as called for by President Karzai and, previously, by the country's legislature and most other Afghan leaders. It is important that this political process be accompanied by a parallel effort in the sphere of development, with a view to creating economic and social conditions that can provide a dignified life for all Afghans and that will not compel them to turn to illegal livelihoods such as drug trafficking. This would put an end to corruption and extremism and enable the Afghan Government to regain the people's trust in its ability to meet their needs. That requires a strong international commitment to support Afghanistan's development strategy.

Paragraph 23 of the report informs us that insurgents continued to expand their presence in previously stable areas. This is combined with the deteriorating security situation, the poor economic situation and the spread of unemployment and corruption. The situation demands a solution based on a comprehensive approach to addressing all of those problems.

The international community's ultimate goal must be to help the Afghan people build a democratic, stable and prosperous State. Combating extremism is not a goal in itself, especially because the use of force by itself will not bring about stability and security; it must be bolstered by a parallel dialogue aimed at achieving national reconciliation among all sectors of the Afghan people willing to engage in dialogue and accept the national constitution as a basis for governance.

My delegation remains gravely concerned about the killing of civilians in defiance of all the appeals and statements issued by Afghan authorities, by the United Nations and by other international bodies and organizations. In that context, we note that paragraph 66 of the report speaks of an increase in civilian casualties of 40 per cent over the figures for 2007. Thirty-nine per cent of these were caused by international and national Afghan forces. We reaffirm our conviction that this trend, if it continues, will not help establish peace, security or stability. It can only fuel animosity among Afghan citizens and will ultimately serve the interests of the opponents of the Government.

Libya expresses its deep concern over the food crisis that the Afghan people could face as a result of drought, as well as over rising food prices. We fear that the world financial crisis could exacerbate the food crisis in Afghanistan. We deeply regret the inadequate response to the $404 million appeal issued by the Vice-President of Afghanistan and the United Nations to address the crisis. We hope that the Afghanistan National Development Strategy will soon be implemented, and we hope that donors will fulfil the pledges they made at the 12 June 2008 Paris Conference.

The March 2008 report of the Secretary-General (S/2008/159) outlines human rights violations and instances of torture and abuse of detainees. It notes allegations of prolonged and arbitrary detention in places of detention run by international military forces and indicates that UNAMA was unable to assess those allegations. The report before us today makes no mention of any progress in that regard; rather, it notes that detention centres and prisons are in a serious state of neglect. My delegation wishes therefore to indicate its concern about the state of prisons in Afghanistan and to call for respect for human rights, international law and international human rights law.

Some progress has been made in a number of areas, including with respect to mine clearance, counter-narcotics and preparations for the upcoming elections. But shortcomings remain, despite all the efforts and pledges that have been made. We must study and review those shortcomings and try to identify their causes.

My delegation welcomes the progress that has been made in bilateral cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and we affirm the need to strengthen that cooperation, because of the historical, demographic and economic ties between the two countries.

Finally, Libya supports the Secretary-General's recommendation to extend the mandate of UNAMA and strengthen its role in coordinating international efforts, as well as to guarantee it sufficient resources and financing to enable it to establish regional offices to bolster its activities, especially in the fields of governance, justice and human rights.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Tanin (Afghanistan): Allow me, Sir, to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of March and to thank you for holding this debate. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his latest report (S/2009/135) on the situation in Afghanistan. I am also grateful to my friend, Mr. Kai Eide, for his comprehensive briefing here today and for his able leadership of the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We have taken note of his important points, the suggestions that he has made and the concerns that he has raised.

The Security Council is discussing Afghanistan at an important time. In two days, the people of Afghanistan will celebrate our new year, so we begin

today from a new perspective of hope. The preparations for our presidential and provincial elections provide a chance to strengthen legitimacy and national unity. The continuing insecurity in parts of the country threatens those objectives but also gives us a clear goal in the coming months.

There has been a welcome increase in international focus on Afghanistan. Afghans are pleased to note the many recent strategic reviews and recommendations, including the upcoming conference to be held in The Hague on 31 March. We hope that that new spirit of engagement will help us proceed in a constructive, unified and coordinated way.

The international community should join Afghanistan in that spirit. In the past eight years, Afghanistan has made progress. We can continue to make progress. Afghans are fully invested in a legitimate, inclusive democratic process, and we see that in the strong engagement in the national debate surrounding the upcoming elections. Afghans want to ensure that their country's future is a continuation of the peaceful modernization that began in the early twentieth century.

Afghans are eager to work with the international community to eliminate the threat of the Taliban, Al-Qaida and other terrorist groups. The Taliban is not an organic part of Afghan society. It is a product of the violence, cross-border madrassas and foreign indoctrination that disrupted our stable society. Today, a mere 4 per cent of Afghans want to see the Taliban in power.

The international community should also be encouraged by the reminder that Afghans supported the United States-led intervention in 2001. Afghans welcomed the defeat of the terrorists and extremists who had invaded and corrupted our homeland. As long as the international forces provide safety, security and the promise of a democratic future, Afghans will continue to be staunch allies. But Afghans are simultaneously driven by the urgency of keeping the dark days securely behind us. The devastation of the Taliban is a constant reminder of the effects of neglecting the destruction of war. The greatest blunder of our time is to forget that the ruins of war breed angry, desperate and radicalized people.

The world has an obligation to act so that the Taliban and Al-Qaida do not return to power. That obligation is both moral and practical. Morally, the horrific abuse of civilians, particularly children and women, anywhere is a threat to freedom everywhere. In practical terms, terrorism knows no borders. Attacks in New York, London, Mumbai and Kabul by the same groups show that the threat in Afghanistan is, indeed, a global threat. Global action is the answer to a global threat.

Afghans have seen the significance of our partnership with the international community. Our biggest accomplishments — our constitution, the elections, the improvements in the Afghan National Army, infrastructure, education and health — are the projects that have received the strongest international commitment. International dedication bears fruit.

But we have only just begun. In the areas where Afghans received less international attention — the Afghan National Police, governance, corruption and judiciary reform — we have not achieved all we should. After the Bonn Conference in 2001, the international community's light-footprint approach brought minimal engagement in Afghanistan. We have only recently refocused, so we cannot expect results immediately. It takes time to build a stable, prosperous, democratic society after more than 30 years of war. Progress is a process, completed only over time. Thus, we must stay the course. There is still important work to be done.

That work should focus on the priority of a self-sustaining, functioning State that serves Afghans, for a functioning State is the strongest bulwark against terrorism. Only a democratic, stable Afghanistan will stop terror and destruction. Democracy should be strengthened, not weakened.

In strengthening the Afghan State, we must have a comprehensive strategy. Today, I would like to highlight a few areas for focus.

First, we should ensure that there are free, fair and transparent elections in August. That process should encourage a protective, inclusive debate that strengthens the legitimacy of the institutions that we have already created through the Bonn process.

Secondly, Afghan ownership must continue to be the linchpin of international efforts. We understand that the ultimate responsibility for our country lies in our own hands. We will do our own work. Therefore, economic development should continue to be implemented through the framework of the Afghanistan

National Development Strategy and the Paris priorities. We must ensure that aid and expertise are available promptly and delivered effectively, efficiently and transparently. Every penny in Afghanistan should be delivered to Afghans. We should also continue to build the Afghan army and police so that Afghans can take a stronger role in the fight against terror. There should be greater Afghan oversight over joint operations with our international partners and an increased focus on preventing civilian casualties.

We want to stress, too, that reconciliation can take place only under the leadership of the Afghan Government. The Government of Afghanistan recognizes the importance of a political solution. We negotiate with those elements of the Taliban who are willing to be reconciled, but any talks must be held with full respect for the constitution of Afghanistan and must be conducted from a position of strength.

Thirdly, Afghans appreciate the new regional focus on our challenges, which protects the sovereignty of our State. We welcome the new trilateral process involving the United States, Afghanistan and Pakistan that started recently in Washington, D.C., and we look forward to a future of increased cooperation. Our neighbours will be the first to benefit from a stable Afghanistan: fewer refugees, less narcotics, more trade.

Today, Afghans hope that the Security Council will continue its newly developed and refocused efforts to help us regain our footing after decades of war. Afghans still look with great hope to the international community and fully approve the extension of UNAMA's mandate in support of the Government of Afghanistan.

Despite the continued challenges of terrorism and violence, despite the critics, despite the resignation and despite the doubts, we know our better history. Afghanistan began its journey towards modernization in the 1900s. Our first constitution, in 1924, made modern education available to all. By the 1960s, we guaranteed equal rights for men and women. Afghans then survived and persevered through three decades of foreign intervention, a bloody civil war and the brutal rule of the Taliban. If we could do all of that, we can succeed in Afghanistan today, for Afghanistan has been, can be and will be once again a peaceful, democratic crossroads of our region and a contributing member of the world community. We begin the new year in that spirit of hope.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on the representative of Canada.

Mr. McNee (Canada): I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to speak on this important subject. Canada continues to support the Government and the people of Afghanistan in forging a stable country and a peaceful future. I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his honest and insightful briefing today and for his deep commitment to Afghanistan and the United Nations Mission.

Canada also welcomes the Secretary-General's recent report (S/2009/135), which offers a frank assessment of the situation. The report outlines some of the progress made, with Afghans and the international community working together to strengthen institutions, fight terrorism, stem narcotics production and improve lives by providing education, health services and agricultural assistance.

For its part, Canada has restructured its own efforts — military and civilian — to focus on six priority areas with clear objectives, making our engagement more focused and effective. We view those priorities as key to the progressive transfer of authority to Afghans.

In particular, Canada is helping to improve the capabilities of the Afghan national security forces. We are also continuing to rehabilitate the Dahla dam and irrigation system in Kandahar, which will improve the lives of thousands of Kandahari farmers and their families, and we are building and rehabilitating schools. Canada has also facilitated an Afghan-Pakistani dialogue on border security, and we are working with the United Nations to help Afghans to prepare for the presidential and provincial council elections this year.

The Secretary-General reminds us of the many challenges ahead, including rising violence and widespread corruption. Those challenges must continue to be met by the Afghan people, the Afghan Government and the international community with determination, unity of purpose and a will to act swiftly.

Canada welcomes Special Representative Eide's pledge to strengthen the United Nations presence throughout the country. In our view, that means strengthening existing regional and provincial offices and opening new ones where necessary.

Canada looks forward to positive results stemming from the new integrated approach, which brings the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the Government of Afghanistan and others together in the planning and coordination of security, development and governance initiatives in key districts. Canada stands ready to work closely with UNAMA on that new approach. We are also committed to working with Special Representative Eide to ensure that UNAMA continues to deliver on its mandate, fulfilling its role as adviser, coordinator and leader of the civilian international mission.

In that context, we note with appreciation UNAMA's progress over the past year in streamlining coordination structures in Kabul, as well as in creating an aid-effectiveness unit. We also look forward to enhanced coordination on the ground to ensure that immediate humanitarian needs are met effectively. UNAMA's mandate is sufficiently robust to address the challenges that Afghanistan faces, and its increased resources will now allow for more action. We look forward to receiving regular reports on the progress that UNAMA is accomplishing in implementing its mandate.

The Government of Afghanistan, UNAMA and the international community must now demonstrate results to the people of Afghanistan in order to restore their faith in their own institutions and in their own capacity to build a better future.

In order to demonstrate those results, the United Nations must ensure a strong presence throughout Afghanistan. That is particularly important in the area of humanitarian assistance. Canada welcomes the deployment of additional United Nations humanitarian officers to Kabul and hopes that that will soon be followed by a reinforcement of the United Nations humanitarian presence in the provinces, where it is most needed. To maintain credibility with the Afghan people, the United Nations must broaden its reach and ensure the timely and appropriate delivery of humanitarian aid.

Expanded civilian-led humanitarian action — notably in aid delivery — is increasingly challenging, given the rise in violent incidents involving civilians and the targeting of civilian aid workers. Advocating for international humanitarian law and the importance of respecting humanitarian space will remain a priority.

In that respect, we urge increased coordination among the United Nations, ISAF, the Government of Afghanistan and the international community. Full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access throughout Afghanistan for neutral and impartial humanitarian actors is critical to ensuring that emergency needs can be met.

The Secretary-General has noted that 2009 is a critical year for Afghanistan, with the upcoming elections of particular significance. The international community has a crucial role to play in helping Afghans to conduct those elections. Successful elections will be a result of national and international coordination and cooperation, including international monitoring, as well as voter access and security. First and foremost, in cooperation with the Independent Electoral Commission, we must help to ensure that the elections are credible in the eyes of the Afghan people.

The Secretary-General has noted some encouraging news in Afghanistan: institutions are being strengthened, and the Afghan National Army is being expanded and is becoming more autonomous. The fight against illegal narcotics is progressing, with the crop of poppies expected to be reduced substantially this year. That is indeed heartening, but the fight against narcotics production must not end with poppy eradication. It is also important to emphasize alternative livelihood programmes to provide increasingly diverse economic opportunities.

(*spoke in French*)

Canada is working with the Afghan Government, the United Nations, ISAF and the international community to resolve the many problems still threatening Afghanistan. Most of those problems, including narcotics and the lack of legitimate economic opportunities, can be sustainably addressed only through regional cooperation.

We welcome the fact that the international community recognizes the regional dimension of the challenges facing Afghanistan. We urge all regional partners to cooperate on economic and security issues as a top priority. Given the challenges facing Pakistan, mutual efforts by Afghanistan's neighbours are more essential than ever to the stability of the region. Canada would appreciate greater United Nations leadership on regional coordination issues, as such coordination is essential to the coherence of regional and international efforts.

The efforts of the international community are aimed at helping the Afghan Government to assume responsibility for rebuilding the country. Afghans must be able to have confidence in their institutions and their Government. In order to inspire and nourish such hope, the international community's efforts must be swift, effective, ambitious and responsible.

Finally, Canada takes this opportunity to commend the hard work and dedication of United Nations personnel and other civilian workers in Afghanistan. Their courage and commitment in the face of dangerous working conditions is a source of inspiration. Permit me to conclude by reaffirming Canada's commitment to the people of Afghanistan and to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Kaiser (Czech Republic): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Montenegro and Serbia; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

Allow me to begin by thanking Mr. Kai Eide, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing, his excellent leadership of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and his cooperation with the EU Special Representative, Mr. Sequi. I would like to also extend my thanks to Ambassador Tanin, the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, for his contribution to today's debate.

The EU commends the Secretary-General for his recent comprehensive report on the UNAMA mission in Afghanistan and the identification of priorities (S/2009/135). The EU endorses the recommendations on UNAMA and the strengthening of its central role in coordinating the overall international efforts in close cooperation with other partners, including the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the EU.

The EU also welcomes the fact that the report of the Secretary-General will be submitted every three months. Additionally, the EU fully supports the crucial coordinating role of UNAMA and its head, Mr. Kai Eide. In this regard, and due to the forthcoming presidential and provincial elections, the EU supports the extension of the UNAMA mandate for a further 12 months, as suggested by the Secretary-General in his report.

The year 2009 will be crucial for Afghanistan and for the engagement of the international community. The security situation in Afghanistan remains challenging, with insurgents increasingly employing asymmetric tactics and targeting civilians, Government institutions, international aid organizations and non-governmental organizations. Despite these challenges, some important progress has been made, and the EU reiterates its long-term commitment to working towards a better future for Afghanistan and its people.

In this regard, we support efforts by the Government of Afghanistan to reach out across the political spectrum to build a broad-based political settlement. Politically led solutions based on dialogue and settlement are key to achieving a durable solution in Afghanistan. The EU welcomes efforts by the Government to bring disaffected Afghans into society's mainstream.

Over the past year, we have seen progress in the strengthening of the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police, the launch of the Afghan National Development Strategy and positive developments regarding economic and social development. Nevertheless, the international community needs to devote greater efforts to ensuring better and more effective coordination of development and reconstruction activities throughout the whole of Afghanistan. Coordinated and effective support to the build-up of the Afghan national security forces is a key element. It is also of crucial importance to strengthen Government institutions and actively combat corruption. Even a legitimate Government will face challenges with a weak State and poor governance. There is no stability without sustainable governance.

While the narcotics trade still poses a continuing cause for concern, the EU welcomes the fact that, after reaching another record level in 2007, poppy cultivation was in decline this past year and a further decrease is expected in 2009. The prognosis of a 20 to 30 per cent decrease in opium production indicates a potential increase in the number of poppy-free provinces to 22. Also, the reinforced international

cooperation in controlling the chemical precursor needed to produce heroin contributes to the fight against drug trafficking. The EU also encourages the Afghan Government, with the assistance of the international community, to accelerate the implementation of the National Drug Control Strategy, including through alternative livelihood programmes.

The main challenges Afghanistan will face over the next year are the forthcoming elections, which are essential to further political development. It is important that the elections reaffirm the Afghan people's faith in their future. In this regard, we support efforts by the Afghan Government to reach out across the political spectrum to build a broad-based political settlement.

The EU attaches the greatest importance to the holding of free and inclusive elections in Afghanistan and welcomes the confirmation of the date of presidential and provincial elections by the Independent Electoral Commission. It is now up to the Afghan authorities, all the political parties and other stakeholders to work for transparent, fair and credible elections in order to ensure the legitimacy of the next Government and provide it with a strong mandate.

EU Special Representative Sequi will continue to monitor political and security developments, and the EU is willing to work alongside the Afghan Government, the United Nations and ISAF to support elections across the country, including by providing substantial financial assistance and, subject to security and other conditions being met, through the deployment of an electoral observation mission. During the period from 22 May to the inauguration of the next presidential term, stability, security and a functioning Government must be ensured.

On behalf of the EU, I would like to underline its continued engagement in Afghanistan, including through the bilateral cooperation programmes of EU member States and the European Commission assistance strategy. The EU is looking urgently at how to enhance and improve its engagement. The EU is the second largest financial contributor. The collective pledged contribution of the EU amounts to €8 billion for reconstruction during the period 2001-2010. The European Commission has pledged €700 million for Afghanistan from 2007 to 2010, and member States currently provide approximately half of ISAF troops.

The EU is strongly committed to the improvement of Afghan State structures and has channelled approximately 30 per cent of its assistance budget through multi-donor trust funds, such as the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund and the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan, which essentially contribute to the reconstruction of the Afghan police forces.

In the framework of its comprehensive approach towards Afghanistan, the EU launched an EU police mission in Afghanistan in mid-June 2007. The mission includes contributions from non-member States Norway, Canada, New Zealand and Croatia. The mission aims at contributing to the establishment of sustainable and effective civilian policing arrangements under Afghan ownership and in accordance with international standards. More particularly, the mission monitors, mentors, advises and trains at the level of the Afghan Ministry of Interior, regions and provinces. The area of deployment includes Kabul and some 15 provinces of Afghanistan.

The EU would like to reaffirm its long-term commitment to contribute to peace, security and development in line with its mandate, supporting the development of the Afghan police under local ownership. In this regard, it decided to significantly and progressively increase the number of mission personnel starting in December 2008, which will enable the mission, on the basis of a renewed mandate, to reinforce its activities in support of the Afghan National Police and contribute to its reform. However, this will require additional resources from contributing States.

The European Union is committed to the improvement of governance and the rule of law in Afghanistan and reiterates its commitment to capacity-building in the justice and rule of law sectors. The fight against corruption, impunity and human rights violations, especially violence against women, is central to good governance, and the European Union looks to the Afghan authorities to uphold the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution of Afghanistan and under international law. In this regard, the European Union encourages UNAMA to pursue its monitoring mandate, in particular with regard to the human rights situation of women.

Regarding the grave humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, the European Union welcomes the strengthened presence of the Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Afghanistan in order to further improve humanitarian coordination. The European Union underlines the importance of freedom of expression and diverse media in Afghanistan and, in this regard, calls upon the Afghan Government to pass the media law approved by the lower house of the parliament.

It is certain that stability and security in Afghanistan are closely linked to overall regional stability. The European Union strongly supports the development of a coordinated approach at the regional level and enhanced cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbours against threats such as terrorism and drug trafficking. The European Union calls upon the neighbouring countries to constructively work together to ensure sustainable development embedded in a stable region.

Fostering stability in Afghanistan is in the interest of all countries in the region and the wider international community. In this respect, the European Union welcomes the upcoming Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, to be held in Islamabad, and the Outreach Session of the Ministerial Meeting of the Group of Eight (G-8), to be held in Trieste on 26 and 27 June 2009. The European Union also welcomes the conference entitled "International Conference on Afghanistan: a Comprehensive Strategy in a Regional Context", to take place in The Hague on 31 March.

In closing my remarks, I would like to assure the Council that the European Union will continue to play an active role in supporting Afghanistan, in close cooperation and coordination with other international actors on the ground, including the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): Unfortunately, time is running out, and I therefore request all delegations to limit their statements to five minutes in length.

I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Wetland (Norway): Thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to speak.

The situation in Afghanistan must be judged against the depths from which that country is emerging. Honouring its commitments made at the Paris Conference last year, Norway remains fully committed to rebuilding Afghanistan. At the Conference, Norway pledged some $650 million for the time period covered by the Afghan National Development Strategy. More than 600 Norwegian men and women in uniform are helping to bring security to the people of Afghanistan and to train the Afghan National Army. No other country receives more development assistance from Norway and no other country is seeing more Norwegian military and development personnel. That is the measure of our commitment to Afghanistan.

We thank Special Representative Kai Eide for his leadership and for his forceful presentation here today. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2009/135) also presents a precise picture of the many challenges we are facing. We share the concern that the Taliban is destabilizing previously stable areas and is showing increased disregard for civilian lives.

But we must look beyond the horrific incidents of violence and see the long-term achievements that form the building blocks of a better Afghanistan. To mention a few of the positive trends, Afghan security forces, trained by their international partners, have increased their reach, poppy production has been curbed in many parts of the country, and the Government and donors are working together to energize the agricultural sector.

I would like to raise three issues here today: elections, the situation of women and our joint international effort.

First, with regard to elections, free and fair elections are to be held in August. The next six months will test Afghan democracy. Well over 4 million voters were registered earlier this year, and 1.6 million of these new voters are women. They come in addition to the nearly 12 million voters already registered. Some argue that Afghanistan is not ready for democracy. The more than 4 million Afghans who recently registered clearly think that Afghanistan is ready and that they should have their say. There must be no doubt in the mind of any Afghan that elections will be held as scheduled by the Independent Electoral Commission. Norway has supported the election process with $12 million given through the United Nations Development Programme. Freedom of expression, media and assembly must be guaranteed to ensure free and fair elections.

Secondly, the situation of women overall in Afghanistan has taken a worrying turn for the worse. We remember the story of Latefa, who had acid thrown

in her face while on her way to school but who said that the attack would not stop her from learning. The most senior policewoman in Kandahar was killed before she could become a role model to many young girls. Women's rights are enshrined in the Afghan Constitution, but it takes political leadership to protect those rights. Increasingly, the men of Afghanistan must change their mindset, too, and, increasingly, luckily, they understand that their children lose opportunities when they grow up with illiterate mothers. Poor countries remain poor when they repress women, and Afghanistan will not succeed without the active participation of its women.

Thirdly, I recently conducted an Internet search for the website of the Afghan National Development Strategy. What I found was a page telling me that the site was under construction. Nearly a year after the Paris Conference, that still seems true for the Strategy itself. Both we the donors and the Afghan Government need to work still harder to fulfil the pledges we made in Paris. We must explain what we are doing and let ourselves be coordinated. The Afghan Government must fulfil its pledge to fight corruption and narcotics.

The coordinating role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is central to our efforts in Afghanistan. UNAMA will play a crucial role in supporting the elections ahead of us. We welcome the extension of UNAMA's mandate. We pay tribute to the men and women of UNAMA and will continue to support their vital mission.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I next give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Ney (Germany): I would like to join my colleagues in thanking Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his report (S/2009/135) and Special Representative Kai Eide for today's briefing. In addition, I would like to thank in particular Ambassador Tanin for his intervention.

Germany fully supports the statement of the presidency of the European Union and shares the analysis it presented on the situation in Afghanistan. As an important contributor to civilian reconstruction and development programmes for Afghanistan and as a major troop contributor to the United Nations-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operations, Germany would like to highlight four points.

First, the electoral process in Afghanistan is an important step for consolidating democratic development in Afghanistan. The international community, in particular through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is successfully supporting the Independent Electoral Commission in preparing these elections. We are looking with keen interest to the political process in Kabul to ensure a stable environment for the upcoming elections. We trust that our Afghan partners will work to ensure a viable and stable process that leads the country from May to August.

Germany has continuously supported the United Nations Development Programme Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow project by donating $10 million in 2008. Germany will provide an additional $12 million for that programme in 2009. Especially with regard to the election process, security remains a critical concern. In that context, Germany will, as indicated earlier, increase the number of troops on the ground in order to assist in safeguarding free and fair elections in Afghanistan. Germany strongly condemns recent attacks on political candidates in Afghanistan.

With regard to the wider build-up of Afghan national security forces, Germany has again stepped up its efforts in police training by providing additional trainers and mentoring teams and has recently begun the implementation of the Focused District Development programme in Mazar-e-Sharif. We intend to further expand focused district development to other districts in the course of this year.

Secondly, Afghan ownership and good governance remain key for the success of the efforts of the international community in supporting development in Afghanistan. We encourage the Afghan Government to fight corruption and the trade and production of narcotic drugs with further increased dedication.

Thirdly, Germany will continue to support reconstruction and development in Afghanistan. The year 2009 is seeing yet another increase in German contributions, to $220 million overall. We strongly believe that UNAMA must continue to play the leading role in coordinating all the civilian efforts of the international community, as agreed last summer in Paris. In that respect, we strongly support the process of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board as the core consulting mechanism. As a major contributor to

the United Nations budget, we openly supported the considerable increase of UNAMA's budget for 2009, and we are looking forward to seeing tangible results.

Against that background, Germany fully supports the extension of the UNAMA mandate and welcomes the increase in UNAMA personnel on the ground. We are pleased to note that, from our point of view, the increased presence of UNAMA in the regions already starts to add value including in the areas of Mazar-e-Sharif, Kunduz and Faizabad.

Fourthly and finally, we would like to emphasize the importance of a regional approach to solving the problems we are facing, not only in Afghanistan, and we encourage an increased level of cooperation in all fields. That cooperation remains essential for a peaceful and sustainable future for Afghanistan and will thus benefit the development of the whole region.

Against that background, we are looking forward to the conference to be held in The Hague later this month as an opportunity to signal the readiness of the international community to continue its support for Afghanistan and the region.

Let me conclude by thanking Kai Eide for his tireless efforts and his successful leadership of UNAMA. The international community and Afghanistan have come a long way. Despite all the challenges ahead, we have been able to help improve living conditions in Afghanistan and to build schools for boys and girls, hospitals, bridges, streets, et cetera.

That success was only possible thanks to all of the women and men from all over the world who are willing to serve in Afghanistan. Let me seize this opportunity to thank them all for their relentless efforts and their personal commitment. We would like to thank all the teams working under the umbrella of UNAMA, including UNDP and OCHA, as well as the many non-governmental organizations, members of the diplomatic corps and, last but not least, all personnel of the security forces for their efforts to improve the life of the Afghan people. Germany will live up to its international responsibilities and continue to support the Afghan people.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mr. de Klerk (Netherlands): Thank you, Mr. President, for allowing the Netherlands to take the floor in this important debate on the situation in Afghanistan. We fully align ourselves with the statement made by our colleague from the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union. In the light of our longstanding commitment to Afghanistan, allow me to make a few additional remarks, in particular on the international conference on Afghanistan to be held in The Hague on 31 March, to which many have referred in this debate.

Before turning to the conference, let me re-emphasize our appreciation of and continued support for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) under the able leadership of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kai Eide. We welcome his presence here and his comprehensive and inspiring briefing today. We cannot overemphasize our collective responsibility to provide the Special Representative with the support that he needs to enable UNAMA to fulfil its broad mandate as defined by the Security Council.

We are particularly pleased that UNAMA has established a presence in Uruzgan province, where the Netherlands, together with other partners, is providing significant assistance and cooperation, both development and military. We see UNAMA's presence in Uruzgan as recognition of the progress achieved by the Afghan authorities together with international partners and hope it will further contribute to the development of stronger civilian structures in the south and to increased capacity of the Afghan authorities in that area. In Uruzgan and elsewhere in Afghanistan, the Netherlands is guided by the principle that development, diplomacy and defence must go hand in hand.

In our view, the Afghan authorities and the international community, with a central role for the United Nations, are all set in place to make progress towards our common objectives of security and development, increasingly under Afghan ownership and leadership. But we are also mindful that the security situation, economic development, governance, the rule of law and the humanitarian situation all continue to pose challenges. And we recognize that the regional dimension needs to be addressed. In that respect, we welcome the initiative of the Pakistani and Japanese Governments regarding the conference on Pakistan to be held in Tokyo next month.

Many speakers have referred to the upcoming elections and the crucial importance of the coming

years for Afghanistan. It is against this background that the Netherlands has agreed, after consultations with Afghanistan and the United Nations, to host the "International Conference on Afghanistan: A comprehensive strategy in a regional context", to be held in The Hague on 31 March 2009. We are truly honoured that President Karzai and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will address the conference, together with Prime Minister Balkenende of the Netherlands, and that subsequently Special Representative Eide, Afghan Foreign Minister Spantâ and Dutch Foreign Minister Verhagen will co-chair the ensuing ministerial discussions.

The Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations are closely involved in the preparations, which are ongoing as we speak. It is our hope that the conference will reaffirm the solid and long-term commitment of the international community, as defined during the Bonn, London, and Paris conferences, to shaping a better future for Afghanistan and its people. We share the view of Special Representative Eide that the conference will provide a timely opportunity to take a comprehensive look at the current political, security and development situation in Afghanistan and will thereby give new impetus to our common efforts.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Cornado (Italy): I wish to thank Ambassador Kai Eide, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, for his frank, complete and thoughtful briefing on the situation in Afghanistan. I agree with the points made to that effect by Ambassador Tanin, the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan. Italy fully supports the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union. I would like to add just a few remarks drawing on our national experience and our civil and military commitment to Afghanistan.

First of all, let me reaffirm my country's full support for the leading role of the United Nations in coordinating the overall international effort in Afghanistan in order to ensure greater aid effectiveness, transparency and secure Afghan ownership. We share the Secretary-General's assessment that the current mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the 2009 budget provide the Mission with the necessary tools to implement the tasks assigned to it by this Council and reaffirmed by the Paris Conference of June 2008. We therefore concur with the Secretary-General's recommendation to extend UNAMA's present mandate for a further 12 months.

The first priority in 2009 — a critical test year — is to hold free, fair and inclusive presidential and provincial elections in accordance with the Afghan Constitution. These elections are essential to winning back the hearts and minds of the people and to ensuring that the next Afghan Government has legitimacy and a solid mandate. We thus welcome the Independent Electoral Commission's confirmation that the election will be held in August 2009, and we encourage the Afghan institutions to find a solution in order to ensure a functioning Government between 22 May and the inauguration of the next president. My Government has already made a contribution to the United Nations Development Programme Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow, and will also provide support for security on the ground through our participation in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

The many challenges facing Afghanistan and the broader region require renewed international engagement, a comprehensive approach and a long-term commitment to working with the people and institutions of the country. Overall security has deteriorated in the past month and the insurgency has staged stronger attacks. In his report (S/2009/135), the Secretary-General has identified two disturbing trends on the rise: attempts to destabilize new areas and increased use of more sophisticated and asymmetric attacks by the insurgents, with an increasing cost in civilian lives. The announced military surge should help to provide better security, ensure free and fair elections and create a safe environment for good governance and development.

We should also continue to use every means possible to further reduce civilian casualties. ISAF has done a great deal in this respect through improved tactical guidelines and transparency. We should also increase Afghan ownership and responsibility in military action.

Simply increasing the military effort, however, will not be enough. We must step up the international community's assistance to the Afghan authorities in strengthening their military and police forces through

training, mentoring and empowerment. Italy already has six operational mentoring liaison teams embedded in various Afghan National Army units, and a seventh will be fielded shortly. Through our Carabinieri, we also provide training and support for the reconstruction of the Afghanistan National Police. Italy is also one of the largest contributors to the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan, and the Italian Government is considering further contributions.

Military efforts must be complemented by stepping up civilian and economic assistance. Our interventions are directed to the health and infrastructure sectors and to other cross-cutting areas, such as women's rights, assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons, food security, demining and fighting child trafficking. We are also committed to improving governance in Afghanistan and to building up the civil administration capacity of the country at the central and local levels.

We followed with great interest the remarks made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, especially on the recent positive developments in the crucial sector of governance. The Special Representative again highlighted the importance of cooperation between key elements inside the Government, which has improved such critical sectors as security, finance, agriculture and commerce.

Our efforts in the justice and rule of law sector since the initial post-conflict phase are well known. The full programming sequence and planned implementation of an Afghan national justice programme remain of crucial importance. Coordinated action by all relevant Afghan institutions is needed in all the provinces.

The situation in Afghanistan is a regional issue. To an increasing and more urgent extent, it therefore requires an inclusive approach. We thus welcome the ongoing efforts of the Government of Afghanistan and its neighbouring and regional partners to foster trust among and cooperation with each other. Following previous G8 presidencies, Italy wishes to continually reinforce the G8's engagement in favour of Afghanistan. To this end, we intend to organize a ministerial outreach meeting with the participation of partners, neighbouring countries and other key stakeholders, to be held in Trieste on 26 and 27 June. We intend to focus attention on four areas in which multilateral cooperation is significant and should be further enhanced: border management, drug trafficking and money-laundering, cross-border projects and confidence-building measures at the civil society level.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call on the representative of India.

Mr. Sen (India): I thank you, Sir, for scheduling today's debate on Afghanistan and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). This is of immediate and abiding interest to India. We also welcome the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2009/135), while thanking Special Representative Kai Eide for his comprehensive briefing.

The latest report paints a bleak picture of the situation in Afghanistan. We accept these facts. We cannot but recognize that the Afghan people continue to be confronted by the twin challenges of deteriorating security and a sense that the peace dividend is being reduced. At the same time, the international community is simultaneously challenged by a renewed security challenge from the Taliban and Al-Qaida and by increasingly vocal questions over the utility of our collective effort.

And yet the report also holds out elements of hope. We see steady progress in the United Nations effort to ensure greater coordination and cohesion in our aid and assistance programmes. It also praises efforts to reform the Ministry of Interior and the police, the work of the various economic ministries and the steady gains in reducing poppy production. It also notes as a sign of progress the fact that the Independent Electoral Commission of Afghanistan will organize the forthcoming elections.

Furthermore, the fact that elections are being contested hotly is a good augury. We are hopeful that the elections will be free, fair and transparent and that the Afghan people will exercise their rights in such a manner. At the same time, we in the international community must ensure that, during the run-up to the elections, the gains secured collectively in Afghanistan are built up, not eroded in any manner. In that context, we condemn today's terrorist attack on representatives of the Afghan people.

While the report, in our view, correctly identifies these positive developments as a window of opportunity to consolidate progress, there is a need to address misgivings over our collective purpose. Let us be clear — the world cannot afford to abandon

Afghanistan again. Despite the strains, this mission remains vital not only to the aspirations of the long-suffering Afghan people, but to the security and stability of the region and beyond. Doubts, hesitation and divergences in our approach to the Taliban and Al-Qaida weaken our collective will. They also invigorate our foe. Therefore, apart from continued application of force wherever terrorist groups are active, we must work together to deny them safe havens, financing and political and material sustenance, whether within Afghanistan or across its borders. The application of force wherever terrorists gather must harmonize with the larger political objective, and UNAMA must play an important role in this essentially political task. Since messaging is important, it is also essential to have greater clarity regarding the ideas being discussed in the public domain. Reconciliation is one of these.

The Secretary-General's latest report subjects this discussion to important caveats. Not the least of these is the idea that reconciliation must be an Afghan-led process, within the parametres of the Constitution of the land. Further, it must be pursued from a position of political and military strength. To this, I would add that the process needs to be undertaken with strategic clarity and unity of purpose. In the absence of consensus amongst concerned international parties over the key questions of reconciliation — with whom and how — such a process runs the risk of opening up divisions amongst us, rather than amongst the elements with whom we seek to reconcile. Furthermore, we must move beyond attempts to distinguish between "good" and "bad" Taliban; such efforts are totally unworkable.

From this standpoint, it is helpful that the international effort is moving towards a more cohesive and integrated approach. We fully endorse the notion that coordination must be based on genuine Afghan leadership and on recognition of the fact that there is no purely military solution. It is precisely for this reason that India strongly supports efforts to build Afghan capacity. It is not only appropriate but essential to invest in such capacity. Without this, we run the risk of assigning responsibility without ensuring that our partners have the means to shoulder it.

In this context, India welcomes the continuation of the useful role provided last year to UNAMA via resolution 1806 (2008). We see that as a logical corollary of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, adopted formally last year, which is a guidemap for the international assistance effort in Afghanistan. UNAMA and the Government of Afghanistan have made commendable progress together since UNAMA received that new mandate, and it is essential to build upon those first promising signs resolutely. That effort needs to be supported with greater resources for the United Nations Mission and with greater commitment to alleviating the humanitarian challenge in Afghanistan, especially given the impact of rising food prices and adverse climatic events. India is working to mitigate the humanitarian impact, including through our recent decision to send a quarter of a million tons of wheat to Afghanistan, although, most regrettably, we continue to face political difficulties in overland transport and transit to Afghanistan.

Taking those points as a reference, I should like to underscore India's firm and unshakeable commitment to the international effort in Afghanistan. For India, the stabilization of Afghanistan is integrally connected with our security. It is for that reason that while we are outraged by attacks upon our people and symbols of our friendship with Afghanistan, we cannot be deterred by such criminal acts. Not only has our commitment to Afghanistan exceeded $1.2 billion, but we have attempted to the best of our ability to expand the range and variety of our projects. Thus, Indian assistance spans the gamut of operations from infrastructure projects, such as the Zaranj-Delaram highway, to institutions, such as the parliament building in Kabul. We have also simultaneously targeted local projects that will provide a peace dividend in the shortest possible period of time, ranging from cold storage plants to equipment for schools and hospitals. Through these efforts, we maintain capacity-building as a core element of our work in Afghanistan. It is in support of that core task that India has agreed to increase the current allocation of 500 seats each in capacity-building and scholarship programmes.

Turning to the regional aspect, we need greater efforts to embed the stabilization of Afghanistan within regional processes for this country to regain its key role as the crossroads of South, West and Central Asia — a phrase that was also used in the statement today by the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan. That includes regional economic processes, such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Such efforts are in the collective interest of the entire region. Hindering that not only affects Afghanistan, but equally each of us

in the region. We therefore need efforts to expand, rather than hinder, trade, transit — especially transit in that context, as I mentioned earlier — and transport ties. That is, in our view, the best way of bringing the regional dimension into the discourse on Afghanistan.

In conclusion, India believes that challenges in Afghanistan need to be seen in their totality. We must analyse where we are today from the perspective of the past eight years. Every step forward has been hard won but each step is a measure of distance away from the destruction of the past. It is for that reason that we must continue to emphasize the progress achieved, rather than bemoan the challenges that remain. It is also for that reason that we should set our sights on realistic and achievable goals, not expectations that are unrealistic in the local context. If we are truly committed to an Afghan-led process of prioritization of tasks, we should concentrate on where Afghanistan has come from rather than on where we individually would like it to be.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Mr. Goledzinowski (Australia): Australia is grateful for the opportunity to participate in this debate. In the interests of time, I will skip some parts of my distributed statement. We agree with the Secretary-General's report (S/2009/135), and with other speakers that have referenced it, that 2009 will be a critical year in Afghanistan. Ensuring the credible conduct of elections will be important for demonstrating that Afghanistan's emerging democracy will not be disrupted by the Taliban insurgency.

Australia welcomes the August date for elections announced by the Afghan Independent Electoral Commission. That timing provides an opportunity for the necessary logistical preparations to be carried out to allow the people of Afghanistan to exercise their democratic right. We also support efforts to find a solution to constitutional issues in a manner that would ensure the legitimacy and stability of government until the inauguration. Moreover, we are committed to supporting the conduct of the elections. We recently announced $3 million for the United Nations Development Programme to establish an independent electoral complaints commission, and we had previously supported the electoral registration.

Afghanistan and its international partners face enormous challenges, as outlined eloquently by the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan. Improving security is critical to reconstruction and development. That will require the Afghan Government forces to take the lead. To assist that, Australia has provided an operational mentoring and liaison team to Afghanistan.

Political reconciliation and, ultimately, a political settlement will also be critical elements of a lasting and durable solution for Afghanistan. Constructive engagement by regional countries will be very important.

But Australia also recognizes the magnitude of the humanitarian challenges in Afghanistan, and we are doing our bit — some 600 million dollars' worth since 2001. I would particularly highlight the work that is being done by my compatriots in the areas of mine action and also through the food assistance being delivered by the World Food Programme.

We welcome the importance attached in the Secretary-General's report to ensuring that development assistance is applied intelligently according to coordinated and comprehensive plans with clear goals. In that context, Australia very much values the efforts of Special Representative Kai Eide and his team in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to achieve better unity of effort in international donor activity. Australia stands ready to be coordinated.

We also support the expansion of UNAMA's reach through new provincial offices. That sends a clear signal of the United Nations commitment to provide more direct assistance through programmes and outreach at the community level, where help is most needed. We particularly welcome the opening of an UNAMA provincial office in Oruzgan, where our military and civilian personnel are deployed. We look forward to working with the new office to improve conditions in that part of southern Afghanistan.

Australia will, of course, participate in the Afghan conference to be held in The Hague. That meeting will be a key opportunity to look critically at what is working and what is not in Afghanistan and how we can make our collective efforts more effective. We welcome the United Nations role in co-chairing the meeting, and, of course, we thank the Netherlands, our valued partners in Oruzgan, for hosting it.

Australia strongly supports UNAMA and the extension of its mandate. We will need to continue to

ensure that this operation is properly resourced. We also wish to record our deep appreciation for the invaluable efforts of Mr. Kai Eide and for his leadership of his courageous team at UNAMA. Continued progress in Afghanistan depends on strengthened and expanded engagement by the United Nations and the international community, in concert with the Government and the people of Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I am very grateful to the representative of Australia for having shortened his statement.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me, Sir, to thank you for having convened this meeting and to congratulate you on your skilful stewardship of the Council's work this month. I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kai Eide, and his colleagues in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for their valuable and tireless efforts in Afghanistan at this crucial juncture. As we have stressed in the past, the Islamic Republic of Iran supports the central role of the United Nations in Afghanistan, and that commitment has been displayed yet again in the recent fruitful visit of Mr. Kai Eide to Tehran.

We have carefully studied the latest report of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan (S/2009/135) and share the view that the year 2009 is very important for Afghanistan and for its partners in the international community. In the past several years, many efforts have been made by Afghan officials and the Afghan people, assisted by the international community, to foster and strengthen their newly established democratic mechanisms, to bring about peace, stability and development and to take their destiny into their own hands. Undoubtedly, much has been accomplished. Yet, a great deal more remains to be achieved.

We are concerned that, despite all the efforts made, insecurity has increased over the past two years in Afghanistan, and terrorist activities, which are perpetrated mostly by Al-Qaida and the Taliban, have inflicted many losses and costs on the great nation of Afghanistan.

Heightened insecurity, poppy cultivation, drug production, drug trafficking, a spike in food and commodity prices and the consequences of drought are among the challenges that Afghanistan continues to face today. As the report at hand indicates, 2008 ended as the most violent year in Afghanistan since 2001, and the attempts by extremists and terrorists to destabilize previously stable areas have, unfortunately, worsened.

Nevertheless, we are confident that despite the gravity and magnitude of the various challenges facing them, our Afghan brothers and sisters will maintain their commendable efforts to seriously address these threats and will continue their journey towards peace, stability and development. If history is any guide, as grave as these challenges are, they will not be able to break the determination of the Afghan people and Government, who are resolutely striving to surmount these problems.

As an immediate neighbour with deep historical, religious and cultural ties with our Afghan brothers and sisters, we share and feel their pain in their difficult times as we share their joys in their successes. We have a vital interest in an Afghanistan that is stable, secure and prosperous — an Afghanistan at peace with itself and with its neighbours.

In our view, incorporating terrorist elements into the political structure of Afghanistan runs counter to the agreement reached among the members of the international community and will in no way help to resolve the current situation. Categorizing extremists as "good" or "bad" is not helpful. Any efforts to bring about reconciliation should be purely Afghan-led and under the full control and ownership of the Afghan Government. In addition, only those groups that recognize, respect and adhere to the constitution of Afghanistan can be considered in that process.

We believe that if the insecurity in Afghanistan is to be effectively addressed, more serious and concrete efforts should be made to strengthen the Afghan National Army and Police, and Afghans should be given the chance, through the Afghanization process, to have full ownership and control over all issues related to their own country. Moreover, as mentioned in the report, at this time of hardship the people of Afghanistan need to and expect to feel the results of the international community's assistance in their day-to-day lives. It is a bitter fact that the results of aid efforts continue to fall short of popular expectations.

Poppy cultivation, drug production and trafficking in narcotic drugs in Afghanistan continue to

be among the most serious and immediate threats about which we have been constantly and gravely concerned. The narcotic-drugs-related menace has hugely damaged the stability, security and development of Afghanistan and has also had appalling consequences for the entire region and beyond. We appreciate the efforts made by the Afghan Government to fight this threat, but we are of the view that their efforts and those of the international community — particularly those of countries with a military presence in Afghanistan — continue to fall short of what is needed.

Iran has fought a costly and deadly war, with utmost determination, against the drug traffickers originating in Afghanistan, and we will continue to be unwavering in our fight against this menace. Neither the gravity of the task nor the enormous human and material costs inflicted on our nation have been or will be able to break our determination in this important fight. We, however, expect others in the international community to join us more seriously in this endeavour and to pay more attention to this threat. As mentioned in the report at hand, such initiatives as effective eradication efforts, coupled with alternative-livelihood programmes, increased incentives for good governance in the relevant provinces, the destruction of drug laboratories, the countering of corruption and more serious prosecution of drug traffickers are among the measures that can help counter this daunting challenge.

The coming elections for the presidency and the provincial councils, planned for the summer of 2009, are of paramount importance on the Afghan political scene. We hope that the State-building process that started with the Bonn Agreement will continue to move forward with the help and support of the international community.

We in the international community need to coordinate our endeavours, to learn from our past experiences and to redouble our efforts in order to help complete the journey that we started by helping the Afghan people and Government seven years ago. For its part, the Islamic Republic of Iran has spared no efforts to extend its full and sincere cooperation in that regard, and we stand ready to continue on that path. We have been an important part of the international and regional efforts to help Afghans over the past several years. Iran attaches great importance to regional initiatives in that regard, and we have also contributed to the international efforts aimed at helping to alleviate the Afghans' suffering.

We have excellent bilateral relations with Afghanistan. The Presidents of our two countries have visited each other's capitals, and President Karzai just recently visited Tehran to attend the tenth summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization. On the sidelines of the summit, very constructive bilateral and trilateral meetings were arranged at the level of heads of State, including a trilateral meeting among Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan and another meeting that included the presence of Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

Iran is actively engaged in the reconstruction process in Afghanistan. We have spent hundreds of millions of dollars in building basic infrastructure, roads, railroads, bridges and telecommunication facilities, in capacity-building and on educational services and facilities. Iran has hosted 3 million Afghan refugees over the past three decades and has shouldered a heavy burden in that regard. Fifteen thousand Afghan students are currently studying at Iranian universities, while 250,000 students are attending Iranian elementary and secondary schools as well as high schools. They are enjoying the same facilities and opportunities as those from which our own students and children benefit.

Finally, as members may know, at this very hour we are approaching the Iranian new year, or *Nowruz*, as we call it. This traditional occasion is celebrated not only in Iran, but also in some other parts of the world, particularly Afghanistan. *Nowruz* means a new day, a new beginning. On this occasion, let us think of a new beginning in our serious efforts within the international community to help the Afghan people and Government to continue their journey towards peace, stability and prosperity. They are a great nation. They will make it.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Haroon (Pakistan): All day, we have had the pleasure of hearing many countries state their intent with regard to Afghanistan. At this time in the evening, it must be said that Ambassador Tanin has done a great job, as evidenced in the immense feeling of goodwill that has been expressed throughout this meeting for him and for his country. I offer him my congratulations.

Allow me to thank the Council for the opportunity to participate in this discussion, as this issue is of vital importance for my country and peace

in the region. We feel the pain and untold suffering endured by our brothers in Afghanistan, who have been the victims of history, circumstances and unrelenting conflict for many years.

For three decades, Pakistan has suffered with our Afghan brethren, and the fallout of the instability and conflict has affected us grievously. The refugee influx into Pakistan remains of amazing proportions, and this is only one side of the reality. We have a vital stake in the peace and stability of Afghanistan. The destinies of our two peoples are as closely interlinked in the future as they were in the past. It is with this perspective and deep commitment that we participate in this debate on Afghanistan.

The United Nations has a central role in mobilizing and coordinating international action in support of Afghanistan, and the challenging circumstances of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), led by Special Representative Kai Eide, cannot be underestimated. It is a major contribution and will remain crucial to any settlement that will be defined in conferences around the world for many months to follow. I would like to thank the Secretary-General and Mr. Eide for the most recent report (S/2009/135), which, to my mind, provides an objective overview of the situation in Afghanistan.

The challenges are well-known, from security to political, humanitarian and development issues. The challenges are multifaceted, daunting in scope and closely interlinked. They require a truly comprehensive, substantial and integrated response that is fully owned and led by the Afghans, with the sustained and long-term attention and support of the international community. The ongoing concern remains the increased violence and insecurity, which continue to be rooted in the complex interplay of Taliban, Al-Qaida, warlordism, factional rivalries and the activities of illegally armed and criminal groups and are fuelled by the illicit drug trade. Popular grievances arising from various causes, ranging from civilian casualties to socio-economic hardships and lack of governance and development, are further compounding the situation.

Terrorism remains a major challenge. It has roots in all parts of the world. Together with Afghanistan, Pakistan faces the brunt of the terrorist and extremist threat. In 2008 alone, nearly 2,000 Pakistanis lost their lives in over 600 terrorism-related incidents in Pakistan. Pakistan's economy has suffered directly and indirectly, with losses in the billions. However, this has not diminished our commitment to curb and reverse the menace of terrorism and extremism. To deal with this menace, the Government is pursuing a comprehensive and multi-pronged strategy, partly through a resolution of parliament structured around democracy, dialogue and development. This approach is being pursued with the support, cooperation and ownership of both populations. Our message is unequivocal. The territory of Pakistan will not be allowed to be used for terrorist activities, while our sovereignty and territorial integrity must also be fully respected.

We are doing our utmost to control and interdict illegal movement across the difficult border with Afghanistan. We have established approximately 1,000 checkpoints and deployed more than 120,000 troops on our side of the border. Reciprocal measures on the other side of the border can complement and reinforce this effort. Cooperation under the tripartite military commission has proven useful, and we wish to see this mechanism further strengthened. We are concerned about the financing and arming of militants and recent incursion of militants into our territory. There is an additional security risk posed by the millions of refugees remaining within Pakistan.

I am sure that as the international community reviews its strategy to achieve the common objective of peace in Afghanistan, we will be guided by lessons of history and past mistakes in this dispassionate stock-taking. We should assess why, seven years on, despite having made some notable gains in Afghanistan through heavy investments and sacrifices, the situation does not give rise to much optimism. Are the underlying causes of insecurity being effectively addressed? Are militancy and terrorism being reined in, or are they spreading? How successful are the military strategies? How adequate and effective is the non-military component? Has international assistance brought about a tangible improvement in the lives of the ordinary people? Are we winning the hearts and minds of the people of Afghanistan? If there is to be a rule of thumb to follow in answering these questions, it should be to ask why so many millions remain refugees in appalling conditions in neighbouring countries.

Afghanistan can best cope with its challenges without intervention or interference. However, this should not mean disengagement and abandonment. As

many speakers have mentioned, this has happened in the past. What is required is a fuller understanding of the needs and priorities of the Afghan people and respect for their traditions, values, culture and religion. We agree with the Secretary-General that the strategy must be to prioritize, rationalize and Afghanize. In our view, the following should be the elements of any constructive engagement.

First, we must ensure a comprehensive, coordinated and balanced approach. It is evident that reliance on military means alone cannot deliver peace.

Secondly, for durable stability, people must assume ownership. There should be enhanced focus on indigenous and national capacity-building in all fields, from governance to security, in order to reduce reliance on external support.

Thirdly, a massive investment in reconstruction, development and social welfare is required with the participation of all segments of Afghan society. The benefits of development, rather than insecurity, chaos and deprivation, should become the talk of the town. The drug problem must be dealt with comprehensively in the context of development through the provision of alternative livelihoods.

Fourthly, in the battle for hearts and minds, persuasion must override force and coercion. An inclusive process based on dialogue and broad national reconciliation can catalyse the consolidation of gains from the international efforts in Afghanistan. The forthcoming election offers an excellent opportunity to harness reconciliation and promote inclusion through a democratic process. Pakistan will provide all possible support for the successful conduct of elections.

Fifthly, any strategy should accord priority and allocate resources for the repatriation of the millions of refugees from Pakistan. A pull factor needs to be created inside Afghanistan to encourage the voluntary return of refugees.

Regional cooperation is the key to sustainable peace and development in Afghanistan. A regional approach has to take into account the interests, the capacities and the aspirations of sovereign States and their peoples. It should build solid stakes in lasting peace.

Afghanistan's integration in regional mechanisms is encouraging. It is a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, it is a member of the Economic Cooperation Organization, which earlier this month held its tenth summit meeting in Tehran, which also hosted the first Afghanistan-Iran-Pakistan trilateral summit. The second trilateral summit of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey took place earlier in Istanbul in December 2008. Pakistan will host the third Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan in Islamabad in May.

Building on the Kabul and Delhi conferences, the Islamabad meeting will focus on five major themes — mining, health, trade and transit, labour movement and human resources development, and energy and infrastructure, including the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project. We also look forward to other forthcoming international engagements on Afghanistan, in Moscow on 27 March, The Hague on 31 March and Trieste on 26 and 27 June.

Pakistan attaches high priority to close, friendly and cooperative relations with Afghanistan. The new democratic Government of Pakistan has made a promising beginning with Afghanistan. There have been a number of bilateral interactions at the highest level. We are making steady progress in building a relationship of deeper trust and understanding. The reinvigorated Jirga process provides a useful means for promoting dialogue and development.

During the visit of President Zardari to Afghanistan in January 2009, the two sides signed an historic joint declaration on future directions and bilateral cooperation. The declaration provides a comprehensive framework to take the Pak-Afghan partnership to higher levels in the political, economic, security and social fields.

I may mention that, despite our constraints, Pakistan is also making a significant contribution to the reconstruction and development efforts in Afghanistan. We have pledged $320 million for that purpose, of which $170 million have already been spent on various projects in diverse socio-economic sectors, training, capacity-building and infrastructure.

Let me conclude by saying that Pakistan will be the primary beneficiary of peace and stability in Afghanistan, which is also the collective objective of the international community. We hope that today's debate will further promote this objective, to which Pakistan remains deeply committed.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to Mr. Eide to make some further observations and respond to comments made by delegations.

Mr. Eide: I will try to be brief in responding to some of what has been said. There has been repeated mention of civilian casualties, which is a very complex issue. Nobody is saying that there has been an intention to cause civilian casualties. Of course we all want to avoid them, and I would also say that the Commander of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) really has made a very strong effort to move in that direction. I admire him.

We also face two other problems in that regard. First of all, I think we will face increasing propaganda from the insurgency over the next year in parallel with an increase in the number of troops. Secondly, we will face the problem that we have constantly seen, namely, the problem of disinformation provided to the military. That can be the result of community disputes or other things, which are sources that contribute to this phenomenon. It is very difficult.

The representative of Pakistan said that we need hearts and minds. It is interesting, for if we say, "we, the international community", we must also, on the other hand, be striving for Afghanization. I believe that only the Afghans can really win the hearts and minds of their population, and therefore this Afghanization is so important.

There were some comments on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). First of all, the gap between resources and mandates is now closing, so more should be expected of us. There is every reason for that. It may take a few more months before we have the staff in place that we should, but I do expect it.

But I have to ask, "expect what of whom?" I say that because we have only the power of persuasion. That is what the United Nations has. If I try with gentle persuasion, I am told that I am too mild-mannered. If I raise my voice, the media say that it has been a stormy conversation. Ministers come to me and say, "We do not like what you are saying about us", and that is absolutely right. I will continue to say things that they do not like when I see that the required level of coordination is lacking.

It is a difficult situation because it is, in the end, a question of political will. The situation is not one in which donor countries are sitting there waiting for us to come and say, "Would you please do this or that?". They have their national strategies that they are unwilling to adjust. That is the main problem we face.

We are strengthening our presence where we have offices and are establishing new ones. We have opened and will inaugurate the office in Tirin Kot, and we will open others, as well. I mentioned Helmand as one possibility. I would like to say to those who argue that we should move faster and that we should establish offices, particularly in the south, that most troop contributors to ISAF do not want to send armed military to the south. But those around the Council table ask us to send unarmed civilians to the same places. I just leave members with that little remark, because I think it is important to keep in mind.

On the humanitarian side, I think it was the representative of Canada who said "Please strengthen the humanitarian dimension", and I would answer "yes". I do really deplore that that part of the overall United Nations activity has gone so slowly, really slowly. As many participants know, that is the result of a debate that we have had for some time. Fortunately, and hopefully, we have been saved by a mild winter.

Finally, with regard to conferences and regional perspectives, I hope that there is a breakthrough now with regard to the regional dimension and regional cooperation. That will really be important. What I hope is that, starting with the conference in Moscow next week, a momentum could be built where attention is not spread over too many projects, too many initiatives, and that we try to establish a momentum on this and carry that momentum through the various conferences that are planned. If that happens, I believe that there could be success.

I thank the Council for all the support it has given to me and to the Mission. And I thank the President for giving me the chance to speak again.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Kai Eide for his frank, candid comments to us.

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 7.10 p.m.